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Choice

1st test

Freeview HD

Humax's ground-breaking set-top box reviewed!

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COMPETITION

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this magazine please recycle it.



The 3D invasion begins, p24

WELCOME

You can wait all year for one exciting tech launch, and
two turn up at the same time...



3DTV has arrived. Literally. Although you won't see it
on the market until the end of April, Samsung's first
40in 3D TV is currently sitting in HCC's Tech Labs three-
dimensionalising anything we happen to put through it.
Even *EastEnders*. Of course, 2D-to-3D conversion is far from its
only talent, so to exclusively test the 40C7000 [on page 30],
we also got our hands on the first commercially-available 3D
Blu-ray, *Monsters vs Aliens*. And, in celebration of the new format,
we give you a complete guide to everything you ever wanted to
know about the 3D invasion [p24]. Forewarned is forearmed.
Then there's our test of **the first ever Freeview HD box**,
Humax's HD-Fox T2 [p60]. While most new TVs will be rolled
out with integrated DVB-T2 tuners, normal HDTV owners will be
looking at this hi-def set-top box and licking their lips.

Lastly, how would you like to win Denon's £4,500 universal
Blu-ray player, the DVD-AIUD? Thought so. Race over to page 22
to enter our competition!

Rik Henderson

TEAM HCC

Rik Henderson:
Dep Ed Rik has worked on
tech mags and videogames
TV shows for two decades



Anton van Beek:
News Ed Anton began his
pro-videophile career over
11 years ago



Mark Craven:
HCC's Production Editor can
write shorthand – he can't
read it, though



Steve May:
HCC's Editor-in-Chief has a
stunning 20+ years as a CE
journo on his clock



Chris Jenkins:
Our ISF-calibrated Tech
Labs Manager is the former
Editor of *Total DVD* mag



John Rook:
Art Editor John first worked
on HCC back in 1999, when
TVs were made of wood



MENU

Win!
Denon's
£4,500 Blu-ray
player
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on test!
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As the AV industry prepares to enter a new dimension, HCC presents an exclusive guide to 3D tech, the kit you'll need and the movies you'll be able to watch on it this year

PLUS...

Turn to p30 for our in-depth review of Samsung's brand-new 40in 3DTV

TECH LABS

Our guarantee to you:

Equipment reviewed in Home Cinema Choice is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best-possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase



CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Martin Pipe:
Technology specialist
Martin co-developed HCC's
Tech Lab operation



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former
Editor of UK CE trade
journal ERT



Adam Rayner:
The UK's foremost expert in
extreme audio writes about
bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Jim Hill:
Apple fanatic Hill is the
former editor of T3 Home
and a What Hi-Fi escapee



Barry Fox:
A veteran commentator on
consumer electronics in
mags such as New Scientist



Danny Philips:
Former Editor of What Video
& High-Definition TV and
dedicated AV boffin



PLAYBACK

HCC's hardware experts cast a critical eye over the latest DVD and Blu-ray titles... p97

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99 Harry Brown (BD)

Kamikaze Girls (BD)

The Invention of Lying (BD)

The Army of Crime (BD)

100 Fantastic Mr Fox (BD)

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Dante's Inferno: An Animated Epic (BD)

Halo Legends (BD)

Planet Hulk (DVD)

101 Zombieland (BD)

103 Triangle (BD)

Saw VI: Extreme Edition (BD)

Doctor Who: The Masque of Mandragora (DVD)

Mystic River (BD)

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104 Gamer (BD)

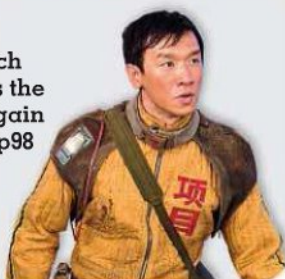
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Flaming-hot designer 5.1 speaker system is sure to please audio lovers

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Top-of-the-range Blu-ray deck with added AV and networking features

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Wireless one-box music streamer

80 Klipsch Icon 5.1 System

High-quality entry-level 5.1 speaker system with plenty of flair

84 UK's Most wanted TVs

The UK's favourite TVs go head-to-head in our latest group test...

Panasonic TX-P42G15

Samsung LE40B650

Sony KDL-40W5500

Toshiba 37RV635

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Win Teufel's THX Select2-certified speaker package worth over £1,400!

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We put together the ultimate home cinema system for the World Cup



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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** MITSUBISHI BIGSCREEN Latest Full HD projector unveiled
iPAD CONTROL Why Apple's groundbreaking gadget could be your next AV remote **PANASONIC**
BLU-RAY SURPRISE New BD decks woo audiophile buyers **BASS BRUTE** Paradigm claims world's
most powerful subwoofer **HDMI REVAMP** Version 1.4 spec updated already! **AND MUCH MORE**

You're surrounded!

Denon S-5BD → www.denon.co.uk

Denon is adding a combined Blu-ray player and surround receiver to its hi-def hordes. Shipping in March, for around £2,000, the compact S-5BD, nicknamed the Cara, uses much of the forward-thinking tech of the manufacturer's flagship BD players and AVRs. Features include HDMI v1.4, automatic detection of the speakers in your setup, and 400W of amplification.



HCC Online...

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Black beauty

Mitsubishi HC6800 → www.mitsubishielectric.co.uk

Mitsubishi has introduced a new high-end model into its Diamond Series range of home cinema projectors. Dubbed the HC6800, the curvaceous model slips into its PJ lineup below the flagship HC7000. Priced in the region of £2,200, the LCD-based HC6800 promises a 30,000:1 contrast ratio and 1,500 ANSI Lumens brightness, plus advanced video processing courtesy of Silicon Optix's Reon-VX tech.



Partner with...

Sony BDP-S570

Style-conscious Blu-ray deck
£230 approx



This stylish new Blu-ray player from Sony is an ideal partner for a Full HD projector. Expected to hit the UK this Spring, the DLNA-enabled BDP-S570 adheres to the company's new Monolithic Design for a simplified, minimalist aesthetic, and features built-in Wi-Fi, Bravia Internet Video (including the Five On Demand catch-up service), a Gracenote-powered Entertainment Database Browser, and the ability to use an iPhone/iPod Touch as the remote control.
www.sony.co.uk

Subs go nuclear



Paradigm has unveiled what it claims is 'the most powerful subwoofer in the world'. Priced

at £7,000, the Paradigm Reference SUB 2 packs a massive 4,500W of power and uses six 10in drivers. If that seems a little extreme, there's always the more reasonable 1,700W SUB 1, which will set you back around £3,500 and uses six 8in drivers. If that's still too potent, then the £1,250 Reference Seismic 110, with a single 10in split-coil driver and 850W amp, might be more your thing.

Q-TV has it large



Q Acoustics has announced a new variant of its Q-TV2 2.1-channel stereo loudspeakers. Like

its predecessor, which launched five months ago, the Q-TV2X is designed for flat-panel TVs. While the first incarnation was built to straddle the back of 30-42in TVs, this latest version adjusts to match larger 42-50in screens, and retails for around £350. 'The first Q-TV model has been an astonishing success,' says category manager Tony Jones.

5.1 in your hand



Fed up with clutter in your living room? Then Boston Acoustics' £400

ultra-compact SoundWare XS 5.1 system could be right for you. Its five dinky satellites are small enough to fit in the palm of your hand, but make the big promise of 'room-filling surround sound' from a 2.5in woofer and 0.5in tweeter. Completing the set is a 100W sub with an 8in woofer.

The SoundWare XS 5.1 ships with wall brackets and is available in black or white finishes.

Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month



1 24: Day 8 (Sky+HD)

The rollercoaster still shows no sign of running out of steam – 24 is as outrageously entertaining as ever. *Steve May*

2 Mass Effect 2 (Xbox 360)



A tightly-scripted RPG that puts many sci-fi movies to shame. It's taken over my life for more than 35 hours. *Rik Henderson*

3 The Ugly Truth (All-region BD)

Enjoyable battle of the sexes comedy – because man cannot live on Statham movies alone. *Mark Craven*



4 Clive Barker's Dread (R2 DVD)



A straight-to-DVD adaptation of one of my fave Barker short stories. *Anton van Beek*

5 Battle for the Planet of the Apes (All-region BD)

Actors in ape suits running around the countryside. Mad, but still kinda brilliant. *John Rook*



BD audiophile innovation

Panasonic's new Blu-ray decks pack a surprise, says Steve May

It's not just about the hi-def visuals. Panasonic's new high-end Blu-ray players, the DMP-BD85 and the 3D-capable DMP-BDT300, also pack an earful of cutting-edge sonic tech, as well as offering audiophiles a fresh look at digital sound. While the headline news is an audio stabiliser which reduces jitter on both LPCM and bitstream outputs, the most interesting innovation sits deeper in the machines' menus – a function dubbed Tube Sound.

It may look insignificant at first glance, but it represents the culmination of years of work for Masahiro Yamasaki, Panasonic's golden-eared Chief Engineer. Yamasaki has been sound-tuning Panasonic's audio gear for a long time, having cut his teeth on the brand's legendary Technics amplifiers back in the day, and has been nurturing a pet project to bring the warmth and tonality of valve amplifiers to today's digital audio. 'Many audiophiles have been unhappy with the digital sound performance of not only BD players, but also CD players,' explains Yamasaki. 'But now we've developed a method of simulating the transfer function of old-fashioned tube amplifiers using a Blu-ray player as the source. Tube or valve amps traditionally have a unique "warm sound", highly regarded by music lovers.'

The man from Panasonic says that the mode should not be considered a gimmick: 'We have carried out a detailed examination of the sonic characteristics of tube amplifiers and we believe we have faithfully programmed these into the



Panasonic's sonic guru Masahiro Yamasaki still loves his Technics valve amp

Uniphier chip. The key was replicating the second and third harmonic distortions responsible for that characteristic "tube" sound.'

Choose your sound

The new Tube Sound Blu-ray players have three modes which the user can select to alter the output from the Uniphier LSI. Each mode creates a slightly different response, but is very similar to the sonic output of an actual tube amplifier. 'One benefit of this approach is that users can effectively create the sound of a seven-channel tube amplifier for home cinema,' enthuses Yamasaki. 'Should you actually want a real one, it would cost a lot of money, but we can easily replicate it with this technology.'

The reason why Masahiro Yamasaki has been so motivated to create the mode? His love for a 1969 Technics valve amp that he still uses at home to this day.

Back to the future: Panasonic's DMP-BDT300 3D Blu-ray player (pictured) and the high-end DMP-BD85 both feature a tube amp sound emulator: 'It's about recreating tonal characteristics and not just adding distortion'. Inspired or insane? Your views are welcome...



Pick'n'mix

Action superstar Scott Adkins picks his five favourite DVDs...



1 Enter The Dragon

'The ultimate martial arts film – Bruce Lee is probably the most charismatic action star ever.'

2 Heat

'A brilliantly crafted crime thriller, expertly photographed. After this movie you had no choice but to shoot gun-fights the way Michael Mann did.'

3 Hard Boiled

'Classic John Woo. The director single-handedly changed the way action movies would be shot.'

4 Die Hard

'At the time of Stallone and Schwarzenegger it was great to see Bruce Willis' everyman action star breaking the mould.'

5 Lethal Weapon

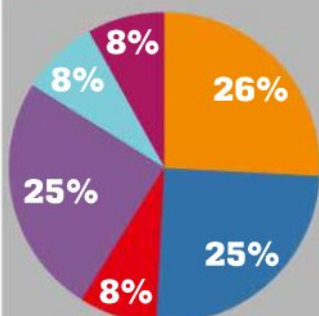
'Mel Gibson was born to play this role in a film that kick-started the buddy cop genre. Darker and grittier than the sequels.'

British actor and martial arts performer Scott Adkins' latest film, *Ninja*, is available to buy on DVD and BD from March 15, courtesy of Lionsgate.

We asked...

Which will be the most exciting AV development this year?

- Bigger OLED screens
- The arrival of 3DTV/Blu-ray
- Apple's new iPad
- The launch of Freeview HD
- TiVo's return to the UK
- Toshiba's cutting-edge Cell TV



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

iPad ready for controller war

Apple's latest innovation could be its most AV-centric to date

With the iPad expected to hit stores any day now, Apple-holics and those with a hankering for cutting-edge gizmos are already salivating – certainly, the touchscreen computer's charms are easy to understand for anybody who's ever been within three foot of an iPhone or iPod Touch. However, the iPad is more than a techie toy – many believe it's about to become an essential home cinema accessory that could challenge established kit from the likes of Crestron and AMX.

Custom installers have already started integrating the iPod Touch into their home cinema builds, and media streaming companies have been releasing remote control applications for the iPhone for a while. Even Sony has recently released an app that allows for Apple's portables to operate the company's Bluetooth-enabled Blu-ray players. The iPad is the next step.

Dave Slater, Managing Director of custom installation specialist DSE Group, thinks that the tablet could make a major impact: 'I have been looking at the coverage of the iPad like a 10-year-old in his favourite sweet shop,' he says. 'The only problem with using an iPod Touch or iPhone as a serious touchscreen control replacement has been the size of the screen, but now...'

He also believes that this could hit dedicated tablet controllers hard: 'Control 4, Crestron and AMX units all use IP technology, but Apple's devices are the kings of home network



The iPad will corner the home cinema control market, claims installer Dave Slater

integration. So, like most high-end CI installers, I will be looking forward to the new Apple product on the block.'

Considering the price of traditional controls, the iPad is very attractive, but that's not its only appeal, as Slater explains: 'At a price point of around £400-£500, it's going to corner the market, but the pad's ease-of-use will make it the best on the market, too.'

This sentiment is shared by Fiede Schillmoeller from music-streaming expert Sonos. His company has offered iPhone-compatible control software for its network media equipment on iTunes since last year. And the iPad offers further opportunities: 'The iPad is an exciting new platform for the home and we are watching it closely,' he told HCC. 'It's my current understanding that our Sonos Controller for iPhone will run on the iPad, and I believe that Sonos customers will use the iPad as a controller in their home.'

'Millions of people already know how to use the iPad as it uses the same interface as the iPhone and iPod Touch. It will also be used in the installer market, for sure,' added Schillmoeller.

So, portable video device or not, the iPad is set to have a long marriage with the AV industry. Apple-phobes beware!



Installer-friendly:
Apple's new iPad

That's Majik



After ceasing production of CD players to focus on digital streaming tech, Linn Products has now released the latest addition to its DS range of music streamers, the Majik DS-I. Priced around £2,500, the system combines a DS player (compatible with FLAC, WAV, AIFF, ALAC, WMA and MP3 files) with a high performance pre-amp and 2 x 100W Linn Chakra amplification. The DS-I's multiple connections include optical, coaxial and multichannel phono – including one for a turntable.

Gladiator to fight once more?



The arrival of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* on Blu-ray last year was accompanied by a gnashing of teeth from AV fans, due to the Digital Noise Reduction applied to the hi-def encode that robbed the image of fine detail. US distributor Paramount may have been listening, as rumours are rife that the company has undertaken a new 1080p transfer in cooperation with international distributor Universal Pictures. Might we get a 10th Anniversary Edition later this year?

Sudden Impaq



German direct-sales outfit Teufel has introduced two new all-in-one 5.1 cinema systems. The Impaq 4000 and Impaq 6000 (pictured) are available exclusively from www.teufel.eu, priced around £980 and £1,250 respectively. Both are based around its IP6000 DP DVD-Preceiver – an upscaling DVD player, FM radio and amp housed in a discrete 5cm tall chassis. The Impaq 4000 uses five individual two-way compact speakers, while the 6000 opts for high-gloss two-way columns.

This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



Heartless: multiple roll-out

1 The choice is yours...
Lionsgate UK is to experiment with the concept of 'simultaneous' multi-platform film releases, foregoing traditional distribution patterns. Its forthcoming horror flick *Heartless* will hit cinemas across the UK on May 21, and then roll out onto DVD, Blu-ray, Video-on-Demand, rental and Download-to-Own on May 24, in what the company is calling a 'ground-breaking' release.

2 Koreans neck and neck
Rival TV manufacturers Samsung and LG Display both recently reported the production of their 500 millionth 'largescreen' LCD. Samsung, though, managed it first, passing the number in January, with LG crawling past the landmark in mid-February. Must try harder!

3 Shrinking Alice
The release of Tim Burton's 3D *Alice in Wonderland* has set a new precedent for the film industry. Despite complaints from cinema chains, distributor Walt Disney insisted on shrinking the cinema run window from the usual 17 weeks to just 12 in order to speed up the DVD/BD release and hopefully curtail piracy in the process.

4 LG goes retro
Forget LCD, LED and plasma – LG is going old-school this year with its Serie 1 Retro Classic CRT TV. Only available in Korea and looking like something you might find in a musty antique shop, the 14in TV comes complete with a rabbit-ear aerial and a switch that flicks the picture from colour to black-and-white or sepia, as well as a more useful digital tuner.

5 Sony pulls OLED in Japan
We keep being told that OLED is the future of display tech, but that hasn't stopped Sony taking its 11in XEL-1 OLED TV off the shelves in Japan. The good

news is that the company is continuing R&D into the ultrathin screen technology.

6 Are you ready to rock?
British loudspeaker specialist Monitor Audio is targeting rock fans with its latest ad campaign. The company has roped in the services of Black Sabbath founding member – and self-confessed Monitor Audio fan – Tony Iommi to help plug some of its new kit!

7 HDMI specs change again!
It's only a couple of months since the full specification for HDMI v1.4 was unveiled, but the HDMI Licensing Body has already announced an update. The new v1.4a iteration will incorporate mandatory TV support for a variety of broadcast 3D formats (the original specs only provided support for 3D games and Blu-ray), ensuring display equipment knows how to adjust depending on the type of 3D signal received.

News x10

8 Tosh confirms Freeview HD
While it's only just launched a Blu-ray player, Toshiba seems determined to get in early with another hi-def source. The company has already announced a 500GB Freeview+ HD PVR, which will arrive in the UK in June priced around £350.

9 Replicator Blues
Warner Home Video has exercised its option to terminate an agreement with DVD and Blu-ray disc replication company Cinram as of July 31, and has entered a 'long-term contract' with Technicolor instead. This will probably come as a blow to Cinram – last year WHV revenues accounted for almost 30 per cent of the global company's total consolidated revenues. Ouch.

10 'Buy now, watch 3D later'
Yep, that's the message from Sony, following the revelation that (alongside its out-of-the-box 3D Blu-ray products), many of its forthcoming BD decks and systems will be '3D Ready'. The company claims that new players like the step-down BDP-S470 (pictured) will have their three-dimensional functionality 'turned on' by a firmware update later in the year.



3D Ready: Sony's BDP-S470 Blu-ray player

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Percy Parker?



Following news that Sony is rebooting the *Spider-Man* franchise, it's now been confirmed that the studio is courting 18-year old Logan Lerman, star of recent fantasy flick *Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, to play the teenage Peter Parker.

Faster and Furiouser

Both Vin Diesel and Paul Walker have signed on to star in yet another two-hours of automotive porn. The fifth entry in the *Fast and Furious* franchise, *Fast Five*, will be helmed by series regular Justin Lin and have its two stars pursued by 'relentless lawmen'.

Bunch of muppets

Ali G Show writer and *Flight of the Conchords* co-creator James Bobin has signed on to direct a brand-new Muppet movie. The latest dose of furry frolics has been written by *Yes Man* scribe Nicholas Stoller and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* star Jason Segel.

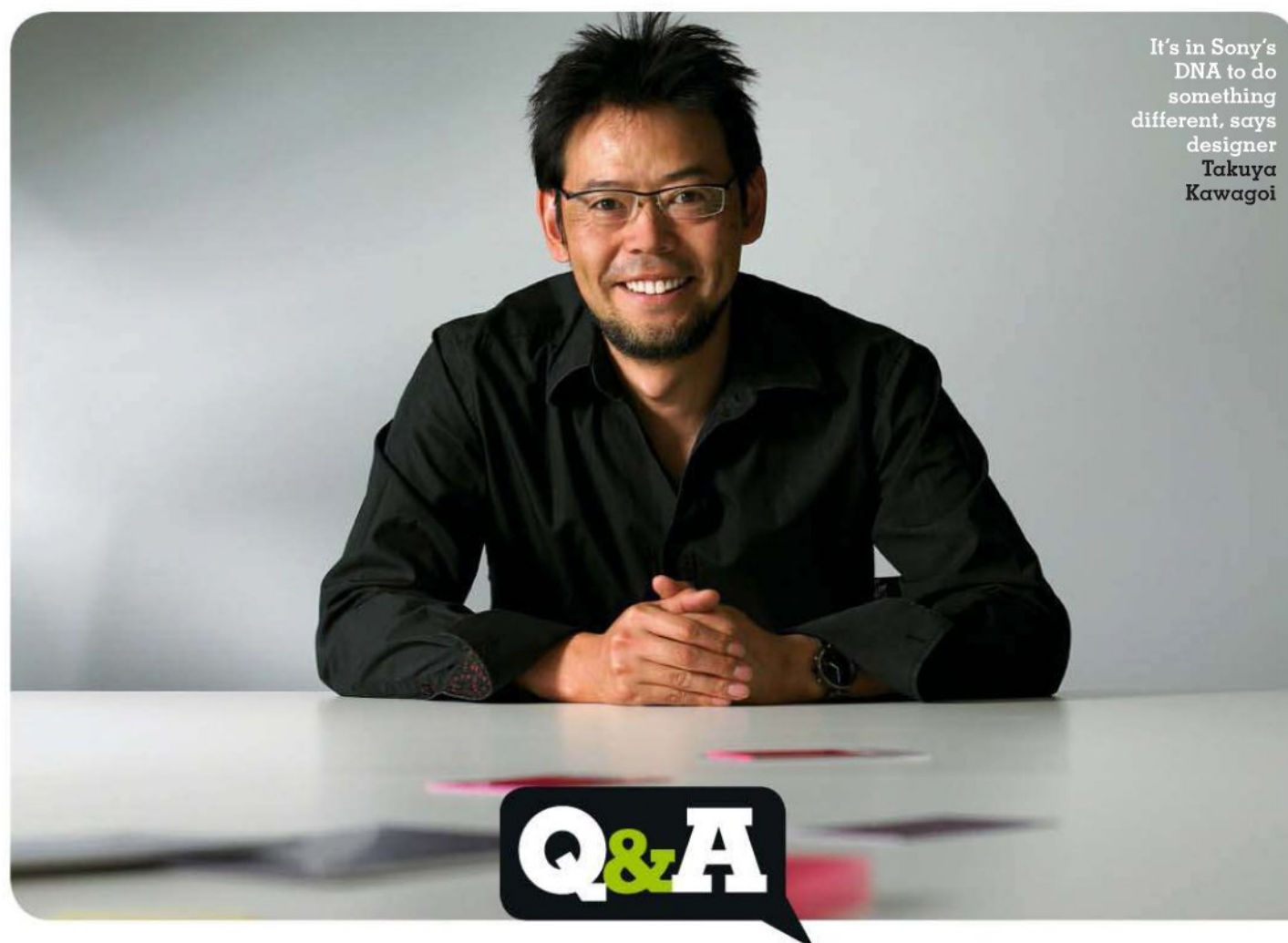
Backinsale



Good news for fans of the vampstastic *Underworld* franchise – original star Kate Beckinsale has confirmed that she'll be making a cameo in the upcoming 3D addition to the series.

Captain's log

During the press tour for gothic horror flick *The Wolfman*, director Joe Johnston dropped some hints about his upcoming *Captain America* film: you can expect to see Red Skull as the film's major villain and WW2 superhero team The Invaders playing a sizeable part in the 2011 blockbuster.



It's in Sony's DNA to do something different, says designer Takuya Kawagoi

Takuya Kawagoi

Adam Hartley talks to Sony's European design guru to discover how the world-renowned brand continues to implement innovative designs to its innovative AV products

Takuya 'Tak' Kawagoi was appointed director of Sony's Design Centre Europe (DCE) last year, earning the role after nearly 20 years work for the brand in Tokyo with the creation of the iconic Sony Ericsson logo under his belt. DCE itself has garnered numerous accolades and awards, including the CES Innovations Design and Engineering Award.

HCC met with Tak to find out more about his team's various ideas, and how it's responding to the changing face of home entertainment. He's quietly spoken and contemplative, clearly driven by a passion for creating the best products and experiences he can. At times throughout the interview

there were long pauses as he would consider his answer. At other moments he would appear taken by a flash of inspiration and scribble an idea in his notepad.

So, what does your work involve?

I'm a graphic designer, with a background in product design. More recently I've been keen to help establish what we call a new 'language of branding' at Sony. Take, for example, the Sony Ericsson logo, one of my designs. The idea there was that we needed to implement something unusual for this industry category – so the green section of the logo signifies something very organic and emotionally engaging, while the silver

portion of the logo represents the product hardware. The logo helps the consumer understand that this is both cutting-edge technology with a friendly user interface.

Is that how technology designers think?

At Sony we no longer think in terms of standalone product design, but in terms of the total story – from the initial design concepts through to the final moment that products find themselves in the hands of consumers.

Why does Sony need a Design Centre specifically for Europe?

Well, DCE is part of Sony's wider design

network, and we work closely with Sony HQ in Tokyo to ensure we are developing common design solutions where necessary.

But being based in the UK, we're also very close to the European marketing people. So we're able to help the European business, rather than just concentrating on following directions from the Japanese HQ. We get the trends and influences from all over Europe. We feed these back to Tokyo – so they can inform their designs over there – and sometimes we work on Euro-specific designs of our own which are exclusively for this market.

Such as?

We designed the 'picture frame' Bravia TV, which was only made available in Europe. Our designer, Hirotaka Tako, created the idea on the understanding of making something unique to a European lifestyle. Tako wanted to produce original European 'design languages' – and not just by surface or cosmetic design solutions, but by investigating what kinds of 'moments' Europeans like to have in their living room. And his answer was based on the observation that a lot of typical TV design is simply not a good fit with a lot of European living rooms – which is why he implemented the picture frame concept as one solution.

How important do you think design is to Sony's typical consumer?

Very important! But this is not 'just' about industrial or product design. We are always trying to take into consideration the design of the overall 'experience' with all of our products. Our designers try to implement 'analogue feeling' with 'digital functionality'.

Plus, it is in Sony's DNA to always strive to do something that others have not done before. To do something different to their expectations. To offer people new lifestyle 'moments' and experiences. To surprise people. **Essentially, we like to make people say: 'Wow, that's cool! That's never been done before!'**

Do you think that some TVs are maybe 'over' designed? In ways that take away the focus from what the TV is about?

TV is currently mainly about using the screen to watch programmes, Blu-rays, DVDs and so on. But in future, thanks to connected TV, people will enjoy YouTube and the many other aspects of having

internet access via the TV in the living room. That means the role of TV is upgraded. For sure, as part of that we try to eliminate any unnecessary decorations or elements.

What research do you do to find out what people want in their lifestyles?

There's quite an aggressive research program that is carried out by the marketing side of the business in Europe. We look at the ways in which people use technology. We carry out immense amounts of research right down to the finest details, such as the users' reactions to the slightest changes in the colour palette for a product and so on.

What about the design of home cinema kit in the next five years?

Sony wants to offer a seamless experience with all of our living room-related products, so with all new products we are always looking for harmonisation with the television. Everything must be related to the UI experience with the TV.

What happens as the barriers break down between mobile and living room products? When the family starts arguing about who gets to sync their PSP or mobile phone with the TV?

Excellent! You have just given me a great new idea [Tak jots down a quick note]. This is, of course, all about how new lifestyles impact on the use of the TV, as we discussed earlier. Another good example on how those barriers between mobile and the living room are breaking down is Sony's new Aino phones, which offer PlayStation 3 gamers a unique multimedia experience; they can access and control their PS3 media content anywhere, anytime using Remote Play. So they can now access the PS3 hard drive's media content using the built-in Wi-Fi or 3G connections of their mobile. Or access the PlayStation Store via Remote Play, or chat with their friends via PlayStation Network.

Finally, what is next on the horizon for Sony design?

We are moving into a new era of design at Sony, so watch this space. Connectivity and integration of all products into the living room are the key things that we are focusing on right now. And, of course, that sense of emotional enjoyment, the overall experience you have when using any of our products in your living room ●



Clockwise from top: Sony's XMB user interface; the Vaio X netbook; the Bravia picture frame TV

Only Sony

Five examples of the brand's cutting-edge design

1 Make.believe logo

Sony introduced its 'make.believe' group-wide brand message late 2009 year, in an attempt to bring together and unite all of its marketing/ PR efforts between electronics, games, movies, mobile and network services.

Sony CEO and President Sir Howard Stringer claims it's part and parcel of re-establishing Sony as the company that brings the 'very best in electronics, entertainment and technology'.

2 Sony Ericsson logo

Tak's most recent claim to fame was his logo design for Sony Ericsson – meant to look like the



Sony Ericsson

amalgamation of an 'S' and a lowercase E. It's both futuristic and organic, designed to invoke the concepts of flexibility and fluidity, Kawagoi explains.

3 XrossMediaBar

Sony's XrossMediaBar (pronounced CrossMediaBar and abbreviated as XMB) is a perfect example of the company's ideas about what makes a successful user interface design, encouraging users to navigate via easy icons instead of a fiddly cursor. As well as being a joy to use it's nearly idiot-proof.

4 Picture frame TV

While traditionalists might grumble, many welcomed Sony Europe's 'picture frame' Bravia E5500 Series, which in addition to looking the part also let you stream your movies, music and photos wirelessly directly to the big screen. An increasingly common trend in Sony's thoughts about how to improve our living rooms.

5 Sony Vaio X

A truly stunning piece of mobile computing design that's also ideal for watching movies in bed. And while many moaned about the comparatively high price, the sturdy build and long battery life on this 12.2mm thin computer still makes it one of the world's most desirable netbooks.



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POINT OF VIEW

Interactive 3D HD games could soon be on the way. Great, says **Richard Stevenson**, as long as we remember they're not real

Until recently, I thought augmented reality was what happened after the second bottle of Rioja. But, according to the media people who like to give new entertainment concepts capital letters and acronyms, Augmented Reality (AR) is the next big thing. In fact, the precursor to AR, augmented vision, has been around for quite a while. See those marker-pen lines that football pundits draw on-screen to show the movement of players, or the virtual advertising overlay on the pitch at the cricket? That's augmented vision that is.

AR takes the concept a step further by allowing the observer to physically interact with characters or objects on screen. Think Sony's PlayStation Eye, and games that use a camera to detect your body movement and translate that into game play. Okay, the Wii's first motion-control camera offering *Your Shape* didn't exactly set the gaming world on fire, but I did lose 3lbs of body-fat and got tennis elbow within two weeks of using it.

The trouble with every AR system I have been shown or experienced to date is that they are rubbish. *Minority Report's* computer interface they are not. Of the several hundred thousand people who bought Sony's original PlayStation Eye, I would guess that all but a few of them have left the camera languishing in a drawer. And, as a group of readers pre-disposed to entertainment from the comfort of the sofa, we're all aware that, no matter how classy the technology, **no-one ever got fit playing a computer game.** The fact is, flaky camera detection and clunky interaction with basic two-dimensional visual material isn't going to augment anyone's reality.

But the future of AR looks much brighter and potentially much darker at the same time. The boom in 3D visual entertainment will pave the way for interactive 3D in the mass market, the exponential growth in processing power will make ultra-slick AR possible, and the man hours of raw

talent that goes into today's movies and games will give us plenty of content to get lost in. The question is, how lost will we get?

Close to the action

The AR model for games is perhaps the most compelling and most frightening. Think of first-person shoot-em-ups in high-def 3D with an AR user interface. You would physically handle the guns and knives, physically stab and shoot the mobs, reach down to pull the crystal from the guts of the alien, and so on. I've already lost several generally sane friends to *World of Warcraft* in 2D, so I wonder how much more addictive an AR version with multiple-screen 3D vision would be? And what about games like *Heavy Rain*, one of the new breed of emotionally jarring and frankly disturbing scenario adventures? Or *Dante's Inferno*, whose ESRB content rating warns of 'blood and gore, intense violence, nudity and sexual content'? I shudder to think.

I don't want to get all Mary Whitehouse here, but there are a lot of people out there for whom this sort of in-depth Augmented Reality content is really going to bake their noodle, to borrow a phrase from *The Matrix*. I know – I'm one of them. I even felt empathy for Cypher in *The Matrix*; Joe Pantoliano's rogue crew member who decides the reality of being a hard-pressed freedom fighter living on porridge is not all it's cracked up to be, and engineers a virtual life back in the Matrix, complete with a juicy steak. In my case there would be Rioja as well, but I am that character.

So, when the machines have taken over, and we are all living in a virtual reality with half the population gibbering wrecks, remember two things. Firstly, that Wii's *Your Shape* was pivotal to our culture in the closing days of mankind, and secondly, you read about it first here in HCC... ●

For more of Richard Stevenson's cinematic confessions log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/points_of_view

Richard Stevenson is trying to engineer an alternate reality where this column writes itself while he watches *The Matrix* Blu-ray



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DVD ADDICT

This issue, **The Beek** explains why Hollywood's paranoia over piracy is playing havoc with his disc-reviewing duties

Theoretically, the life of a DVD/Blu-ray reviewer is a cushy one. Lovely PR folk send you copies of more movies than you could ever want to watch, in the hope that you'll feature them in your magazine. So you get to enjoy all the films you missed at the cinema in the comfort of your own home prior to their actual street date. Lovely jubbly. However, the reality is a little different – and it's become worse since the introduction of Blu-ray.

You see, there are a number of film distributors out there who struggle to accommodate monthly titles like *HCC*. A publication like ours needs to receive a review copy about six weeks prior to its release, in order for the review to appear around the same time as the film hits the shop shelves. And sometimes, that just doesn't happen.

Why some Blu-ray discs, in particular, aren't made available early varies from company to company. Several have been in touch to say that the problems stem from the replication side of things; the relatively small number of disc-authoring companies used creates a bit of a backlog, and there's no way of getting copies produced earlier. Fair enough, I suppose. Then there are companies like Entertainment in Video, which typically refuses to make any Blu-rays available for review and sends out DVD copies instead. Which is hardly ideal for a magazine about hi-def home cinema heaven.

But the most problematic of all is Universal Pictures, a distributor that seems to have a pathological fear of piracy, indeed one that extends to the belief that **tech journalists like to spend their spare time ripping copies of movies** from preview discs and flogging them at car boot sales. To this end, several years ago Universal started burning in 'Property of Universal Pictures' into the picture,

every 15 minutes, on most of its high-profile DVD review titles. Not only does this just pull you out of the film you're trying to watch, it makes it tricky to evaluate the image quality of the disc when the transfer isn't identical to the one that you, the readers, will be getting.

However, that's nothing compared to how Universal is handling Blu-ray. Presumably realising that it would be expensive to do the same trick on BD review platters (especially when the discs are often direct copies of the US masters, right down to the MPAA ratings), Universal instead withholds BDs until two weeks before release. That's not a problem for a daily or weekly publication – you know, the sort of glossy mag or national newspaper that they crave coverage in, but which probably doesn't give two figs for the HD format. But when it comes to a mag like ours, the kind that serves consumers at the cutting-edge of AV who want to know all about the expensive hi-def titles they're going to pay out for, it doesn't work so well.

And anyway, forgive me if I'm wrong, but I thought one of the things that the studios loved about Blu-ray over HD DVD was its advanced copy protection. So why all the concern about journalists pirating the damn things?

All this makes me wonder what will happen when 3D BD discs start reaching the market. Are we going to get those 'Property of...' graphics leaping out of the screen into our eyes midway through a film? Or will some studios send out plain old 2D BD discs instead of 3D versions, expecting us to write a review of the stereoscopic version based on that (and believe me, there are some companies out there that expect us to do that with DVDs for BD releases). Whatever the case, I can't say I'm looking forward to it ●

Read all of the *The Beek's* movie-related ramblings at www.homecinemachoice.com/dvd_addict

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TECH TANTRUM

Industry veteran **Barry Fox** reckons Freeview HD's launch has been as badly-orchestrated as the War on Terror

So far, the only way to get HD broadcasts has been to install a satellite dish for Sky HD or Freesat, or get Virgin Media's cable service. Getting HDTV through an ordinary roof aerial was until recently an impossible dream.

Now there's a firm promise of HD from Freeview for half the UK's homes this year, starting in March. Two clever tech tricks have made the impossible possible. One was to juggle Freeview's frequencies and force everyone to retune their receivers last September, releasing enough airspace for an HD multiplex. The second trick was to use a new transmission system, called DVB-T2, along with MPEG-4 compression to get up to four HD programmes into one 40Mbps multiplex.

Thanks to these tricks, which the UK is pioneering ahead of the rest of the planet, World Cup footie fans will be able to watch Cristiano Ronaldo rolling around in *faux* agony in hi-def.

Buzzing around

There are two flies in the ointment, though. Firstly, even though a TV set is badged HD Ready and has the Freeview logo, it won't get Freeview HD unless it is hooked up to a separate Freeview HD set-top-box, like Humax's HD-Fox T2 (see page 60). The only standalone TVs that will get the new HD broadcasts will be those badged with a new Freeview HD logo.

So far Freeview has done zilch to promote the logo and educate us on why it is important. You will have to dig in the Freeview website for the buried page that vaguely advises 'look out for the Freeview HD logo to ensure that you have an approved product.' And, although the BBC (makers of *Being Human*, pictured) is a key player in Freeview and holds the Ofcom licence to run the HD multiplex, it does not feel obliged – or even free – to do the education job that Freeview isn't doing.

One sneaky reason for inaction may be that promoting the HD logo before Christmas could

have killed off sales of ordinary HD Ready sets to unsuspecting punters. But this doesn't explain the fact that well into this year, there was still no logo promotion on view.

The other fly in the hi-def ointment is potentially dodgy reception in fringe areas.

The T2/MPEG-4 system was designed to be a straight upgrade for current Freeview (which uses DVB-T and MPEG-2). T2 should work perfectly with the same aerial and signal strength as current Freeview. But because of airspace congestion, four areas of the UK, including London, will get the HD signal at half, or even less than half, the normal Freeview power.

The BBC's engineers admit they will not know what this means in practice until real sets are in real homes. But **some viewers with less than perfect aerials and in fringe areas can expect HD pictures that break up**, just like early On Digital pictures.

Freeview is supposed to be updating its postcode checker to take HD signal strength cuts into account – but to promote the checker, Freeview will first have to admit and explain the low powers.

So far all this has passed largely unnoticed, because Freeview handled the HD launch announcement in a very strange way. Although a technical briefing was held at the BBC's TV Centre, the Beeb engineers who run the hi-def show had no say in who was invited. Thankfully, some members of *Team HCC* managed to cadge along, but they weren't even allowed to talk about the products on show. And questions about signal strength and bitrates were glossed over.

If nothing else, the briefing served the very useful purpose of making me wonder what Freeview might be hoping to hide. Now we know: two big flies which I am on a public service mission to explain... ●

Are you lucky enough to have Freeview HD yet? Let us know your experiences at hcc@futurenet.co.uk




































Like some kind of audiovisual superhero, **Barry Fox** is fighting the evil forces of low-power hi-def broadcasts so you don't have to



Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **HCC's calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

Hi-def hero:
Gandalf and
chums are
out on
Blu-ray,
April 6

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				12  <p>Green Zone Matt Damon stars in what looks like another <i>Bourne</i>-style action fest, this time centred on a rogue US soldier hunting WMDs in the Middle East. In UK cinemas from today www.greenzonemovie.com</p>	13  <p>Happy Birthday! Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, better known today as larger-than-life sci-fi author and founder of Scientology L Ron Hubbard, was born on this day in 1911. Expect Tom Cruise to host a big party to mark the date</p>	14  <p>Mothering Sunday It's the day of the year to be nice to your mum. If flowers and chocolates aren't your thing, you could do worse than buy her the marvellous romantic drama <i>Bright Star</i>, newly released on R2 DVD</p>
15  <p>Survival of the Dead Bypassing cinema altogether and receiving its debut on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today is George A. Romero's latest trip into the world of low-budget zombie filmmaking</p>		17  <p>The Bounty Hunter HCC favourite Gerard Butler and Jennifer Aniston star in this action rom-com about a bounty hunter whose next target is his ex-wife. Track it down today at cinemas across the UK www.thepursuitbegins.com</p>	18  <p>The National Homebuilding & Renovating Show The Birmingham NEC's doors open today for a four-day expo filled with advice, ideas and innovations for DIY homebuilders. A good place to start if you're planning an install, too</p>	19  <p>Season of the Witch Nic Cage heads up this medieval fantasy about a group of 14th-century knights transporting a suspected witch to a monastery. Look for it at cinemas across the UK from today www.seasonofthewitchfilm.com</p>	20  <p>The Ideal Home Show Still after advice on how to transform your house into a smart home and get hands-on with the latest household gadgets? Then visit this 17-day expo that kicks off at London's Earls Court today www.idealhomeshow.co.uk</p>	21  <p>Who Shot JR? March 21 will live on in soap opera history as the date of the US broadcast of the 1980 season finale of TV series <i>Dallas</i>, which ended with an unknown assailant shooting badboy oil baron JR Ewing</p>
22  <p>The Twilight Saga: New Moon Teenage girls will be arguing about 'Team Edward' and 'Team Jacob' all over again as the second in the unfathomably popular <i>Twilight</i> series comes to DVD and BD in the UK www.newmoonthemovie.com</p>				26  <p>Clash of the Titans Despite Ray Harryhausen's monsters, the original <i>Clash of the Titans</i> is a bit of a snooze-fest. Will this big-budget remake ramp up the excitement? Find out today when it opens at UK cinemas www.warnerbros.com</p>		
29  <p>Day of the Dead The third part of George A. Romero's original zombie trilogy gets its UK Blu-ray debut. It's from the same company that did such a sterling job with <i>Dawn of the Dead</i>, so we're expecting good things again</p>		31  <p>How to Train Your Dragon Not bothered by the upcoming <i>Shrek Forever</i>? Then maybe this other DreamWorks CG feature will float your boat. Catch it at UK cinemas today in either 2D or 3D www.howtotrainyourdragon.com</p>		02  <p>Kick-Ass Based on a best-selling comic, <i>Kick-Ass</i> follows a high school student who decides to become a superhero, despite a lack of superpowers. At UK cinemas this Thursday www.kickass-themovie.com</p>		
5  <p>Easter Monday It's a Bank Holiday today, which means there aren't many new DVD or BD releases in the UK. So you can spend the day chilling out at home scoffing Easter Eggs instead – or hunting for them on your disc collection</p>	6  <p>The Lord of the Rings Trilogy Boxset This is it fanboys! Peter Jackson's fantasy trilogy finally makes its BD debut in the UK this Tuesday. It has only the theatrical cuts of the films, but if you like your Hobbits in hi-def you won't want to miss this</p>	7  <p>R.I.P. Actor Paul David Graf died of a heart attack on this day in 2001. He's probably best-known for his performance as Sgt. Eugene Tackleberry in the <i>Police Academy</i> franchise</p>	8  <p>HCC #181 Start saving your pennies for HCC #181. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed to the gills with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com</p>			



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impeccable, truly high-end movie experience.

Denon has donated one of these beasts to give away to an incredibly lucky HCC reader. Just answer the following question, and the reader whose correct entry is drawn after the closing date will never again have to put up with anything less than the best...

Blur's pop video for *The Universal* was inspired by what movie?

- A: *The Red Shoes*
- B: *A Clockwork Orange*
- C: *Blue Velvet*
- D: *The Green Mile*

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Are you ready for the 3D invasion?

The home viewing experience enters a new dimension. **Team HCC** dons 3D specs...

With Hollywood, media moguls, cinemas and the electronics industry all rushing to create a 3D future, we're heading for the third dimension whether you like it or not.

Of course, 3D special effects have been popping up in cinemas and thrilling audiences since the 1950s, but rubber sharks aside, it's never been more than a fad. Likewise, ignoring prototype 3DTVs at electronics shows is an annual event for *HCC*'s reporters, so why is there such a buzz now?

This time, it seems all three moons are aligned – in 3D of course. The technology is now able to show convincing stereoscopic films in high-definition without causing eyestrain;

Hollywood is turning out cracking made-for-3D movies, including its biggest ever blockbuster; and the electronics industry is galvanised in its desire for a new way to sell flatscreens.

The only random factor is the audience, but if cinema ticket sales are anything to go by, we're ready for it. 3D screenings of *Up* were five times more popular than 2D showings according to most cinema groups, while James Cameron's *Avatar* is carrying the torch for 3D by becoming the most popular theatrical release ever. Persuading a home audience that's still dusting off the new HDTV to upgrade and buy a 3D set on the promise of similar thrills in the living room may prove a harder sell. But that won't stop them having a go... >



3D QUEEN

Avatar is the
highest-grossing
movie ever made

The kit

The major 3D-capable hardware coming your way soon



Optima: DW318 projector
BenQ: MP780 ST projector
JVC: GD-463D10 Pro 3DTV
LG: LD920 and Infinia TVs;
BX580 Blu-ray player



Panasonic: TC-PVT25 TV, DMP-BDT300 Blu-ray player
Samsung: C7000, C8000, C9000 LED TVs; LCD750 LCD TV; PDP8000 plasma TV, BD-C6900 Blu-ray player; HT-C6730W all-in-one Blu-ray system
SIM2: One dual projector array and one consumer model in the pipeline



Sony: Bravia LX903, HX903 and HX803 TVs; PS3, BDP-S770, BDP-S570 and BDP-S470 Blu-ray players
Toshiba: ZX900 Cell TV

The technology

The 3D 2010-style is emphatically not the same as the bleary-eyed anaglyphic system that most of us grew up with. The old cardboard glasses that were still being bundled as recently as the 3D Blu-ray releases of *Coraline* and *My Bloody Valentine* use red and cyan lenses to create the impression of depth, but the process destroys colour fidelity and the mental strain of combining two out-of-sync images causes all manner of brain pain. Convincing a sceptical public that the new system is very different will be a major obstacle.

3D without glasses is the Holy Grail of AV, but for now, both cinema and TV screens still rely on the use of specs. These have evolved essentially into two quite different technologies; those that use passive polarised lenses, and the active shutter lenses that synchronise with the 3D image on screen.

It's a fairly even split with cinema chains dishing out passive glasses to their audiences, and CE brands overwhelmingly choosing an active solution. Over sixty per cent of all theatres use a polarised 3D solution, principally because the cost of active glasses would be prohibitive – multiplexes could not afford to risk losing such expensive eyewear and

the cost of cleaning it would be exorbitant. Broadcasters like Sky use a side-by-side half-resolution 3D system that is fully-compatible with both polarising and (frame sequential) active shutter TVs.

And as with many new technologies, there looks likely to be mutually-incompatible formats. Confused? You're not alone...

Multiplex mis-match

In the cinemas patrons have a choice of four systems. Dolby 3D cinemas use three-chip DLP projectors with Infitec processing and passive glasses. The advantage is that there's no need for the cinema to install a 'silver screen'. Sony and RealD have teamed up to use Sony's digital 4K projectors for 3D screenings. Disney 3D is similar, but uses a process called circular polarization. Meanwhile IMAX, the only chain not to go digital yet, is currently using two analogue film projectors to great effect with linear polarised 3D glasses.

Oliver Pasch, Sony's head of digital cinema, is very keen on the growth of

3D: 'Not only have there been vast improvements to the technology, we're now seeing major filmmakers embracing 3D as a new way of storytelling. The Camerons and Katzenbergs of this world are pioneering in 3D, and it's coupled with an enormous effort on the studio side to create a first-class 3D experience that doesn't cause eyestrain.'



HOME MOVIES
Panasonic's first Full HD 3D pro-camcorder is on the way



All roads lead to 3D:
London's IMAX at Waterloo is the home of 3D cinema in the capital

NO CHIPS

Passive glasses use polarised lenses, so are cheap to make



Festive fun: Disney will open its BD 3D account with *A Christmas Carol*

Similarly, the TV manufacturers, faced with a different set of technical issues for achieving 3D on the small screen, have come up with their own solutions. These are varied, but they virtually all use expensive active shutter glasses, which will be sold separately for approximately £100 a pair. Frustratingly, there's no guarantee that you'll be able to use one brand's active shutter glasses with a rival active shutter TV. Quite how this shakes down remains to be seen.

RealD has long been the dominant player in cinemas, and licensing deals with Samsung, Sony, Toshiba, Panasonic and JVC will make it the most prevalent in the home, too. Its proprietary technology is able to multiplex a left and right eye 3D image of the common side-by-side 3D format into a single 3D picture using patented active shutter glasses.



Take the strain: Oliver Pasch, head of Sony Digital Cinema, praises the latest 3D tech

Home invasion

Of the consumer electronics companies, Samsung is betting big on 3D and has already made sure nearly half of its vast 2010 TV range is 3D ready, with a 3D Blu-ray player and all-in-one solutions also on the way. A source at the company's R&D facility explained the push in simple terms: '3D is a game changer – and we see it being a major driver for home entertainment.'

Sony, too, is particularly well placed for the 3D revolution with everything from 3D film cameras and 4K cinema projectors to some impressive-looking 3DTVs and Blu-ray players. The ace up its sleeve though, is the PlayStation 3 console, which will become 3D-enabled with a

free firmware update this year (see box, right).

A third major player in 3D at home is Panasonic, and of all the electronics brands, it's making the loudest noise



George Mead: LG will produce active and passive TVs

about 3D, largely through its inspired association with *Avatar*. One source has even hinted to

HCC that the company already has plans to bundle copies of the 3D Blu-ray release, when it eventually launches, with its hardware.

Panasonic's two 3D plasma TVs, poised for a UK release this Summer, seem particularly well-suited to displaying the 3D format, which thrives on a speedy response time. The brand's 600Hz NeoPDP panels have an inherent advantage over slower LCD panels, by pretty much eliminating crossover between left and right images, creating

a crisp smooth 3D image with tangible depth.

Panasonic is also going a step further by introducing the world's first integrated Full HD 3D camcorder, a \$21K model aimed at the professional market. It uses a twin lens to capture 3D images at 1080p resolution, instead of having to use two separate camcorders in a rig with a PC controlling them in tandem. Panasonic's manageable device records images onto high-capacity SD cards.

It's LG, though, that has managed to give the public a glimpse of its first compatible TV, the LD920 3D set that Sky has already used for its 3D broadcast trials. This screen uses passive 3D glasses, but other 3D sets from the brand will use active shutter tech.

Explains George Mead, Marketing Manager of LG TV: 'Our aim is to provide consumers with an immersive enhanced viewing experience, with both passive and active technology options. Although LG's first 3DTV to launch in the UK uses passive technology, May will see the launch of 3D technology on a range of Full LED TVs, including the flagship Infinia model.'

The PS3

Sony is ready to power up the 3D bandwagon on Blu-ray discs



Sony's PlayStation division is poised to play a pivotal role in the uptake of 3D at home. In the same way that the PS2 gave the fledgling DVD format a leg-up and the PS3 hammered the nails in HD DVD's coffin, the PS3 console will be the device that most people will be using to play 3D Blu-rays. We're also guessing that 3D games will see the fastest uptake in the home. Two simple firmware updates, available free this Summer from the PlayStation Network (PSN), are all that's needed to turn existing PS3s into 3D players.



The fact that the PS3's HDMI ports are the old v1.3 kind won't be a problem as the conversion is all done with software handled by PS3's powerful Cell processor. Jonathan Fargher, Senior PR Manager at SCE explains: 'Compatibility with 3D over HDMI can be achieved through PS3's system software update, and it doesn't require any change in hardware specifications for PS3.'

**MEATY**

Sony will release *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* on 3D Blu-ray later this year

The discs

The 3D BDs you can look forward to in the next 12 months

Monsters vs Aliens



DreamWorks' CG-animated feature made a big splash at CES by becoming the first ever 3D Blu-ray disc to be announced. DreamWorks CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg and Technicolor's Fred Rose took to Samsung's stage to showcase the title (which will be bundled with Samsung's 3D specs). The latter promised that 'the home version of *Monsters vs Aliens*, playing on the Samsung flatscreen, will be just as life-like as in the cinema'.

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Given its parent company's huge investment in 3D screens and players, it's no surprise that this hilarious film (reviewed on p100) will be the first Blu-ray release from Sony Pictures. *Cloudy...* will hit US streets this Summer to coincide with the launch of Sony's 3D hardware.

A Christmas Carol

Disney has confirmed that the recent box office hit *A Christmas Carol* will be its debut 3D Blu-ray disc, stating that the festive 'toon will be 'available broadly in the fourth quarter of 2010'. But, in an effort to offer early adopters 3D content, Disney has also created a *3D Showcase Disc* with the aim of making it available to manufacturers to bundle with 3D hardware. This compilation includes the 1953 Donald Duck short *Working for Peanuts*.

Avatar

Expectations were high that James Cameron's sci-fi would be the key 3D BD release of the year, with the director himself originally claiming that the title would hit in November (following a 2D hi-def version in April). However, the director was wrong, as distributor Fox has now said that it won't appear before 2011. Pah.



Spot the lady: Sky recently trialled its 3D service by screening a football match in pubs across the UK

The creators

The 3D hardware market would be pointless if there was no content for it to display. The process begins at the filming stage, involving specially-designed cameras, which increases the costs for moviemakers.

As ever, the adult entertainment industry is at the cutting-edge of this technology, but it's a question of economics and only the largest studios will compete.

Joone, the owner of forward-thinking smut studio Digital Playground, told *HCC* his company is already prepared for the future. 'We're shooting in 3D already and we'll release what we have when there are enough players and TVs out there that support [the format]. I see it as an opportunity. The new 3D technologies are very good and really enhance the voyeuristic aspect of adult movies by putting you even closer to the action.' Which, we suppose, is good news for some people.

Moving to more mainstream entertainment, and in the UK its Sky leading the charge. The satcaster has already claimed the first live sports broadcast (when it decked out a selection of pubs across the UK with 3DTV, and broadcast

Manchester United's victory over Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium) and will launch a dedicated 3D channel for pubs in April, called Sky 3D. Good news for consumers is that the

existing Sky+HD set-top boxes are already compatible with the 3D signal. This means Sky+HD subscribers will only need to get a 3DTV to be watch 3D content, when a consumer service goes live in October.

Gerry O'Sullivan, Sky's director of strategic product development, believes 2010 is the year for 3D TV: 'People have already embraced 3D cinema and, because Sky's 3D service uses the same kind of technology, we're confident there will be demand for sport, movies, concerts and drama in 3D.'

Sky's biggest PayTV competitor, Virgin Media, is also demoing 3DTV right now at its store in London's Westfield shopping centre, and reckons 3D is perfectly suited to its on-demand service. It will launch on-demand 3D viewing 'as soon as there's enough content.' Like Sky, all you'll need to



WAIT!

Avatar won't arrive on 3D Blu-ray until 2011, according to 20th Century Fox

3D READY

Sky's HD units are already compatible with its 3D satcast



view it is a 3D TV with either passive or active glasses; the signal will be detected and displayed accordingly by the TV.

Now that the BDA (Blu-ray Disc Association) has finalised the standard, 3D movies are all set to appear on the increasingly popular high-definition disc format, too. There's only a smattering of discs announced so far (see 'The Discs' left) and James Cameron's *Avatar* is not amongst them, but the title will no doubt play a key role in the format's take up.

Speaking of *Avatar*, the remarkable box office success of James Cameron's 3D sci-fi epic (it's the first film ever to make \$2 billion internationally) was exactly the news that Hollywood was praying for with regards to the commercial viability of 3D. Movie studios are now tripping over themselves to announce 3D titles, with this year alone throwing out the likes of *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Shrek Forever After*, *Toy Story 3*, *Piranha 3D*, *Tron Legacy* and *Yogi Bear*, not forgetting *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part One* and *Clash of the Titans*, both of which were shot flat, but which Warner subsequently decided to convert to 3D in post production. And, looking forward to the future, it seems likely that Sony's *Spider-Man* reboot will be shot in 3D, while rumours persist that George Lucas is planning to re-jig the original *Star Wars* trilogy in 3D. It seems that if you aren't making a 3D film, Hollywood just isn't interested – or maybe it is, so long as you don't mind the studio converting your 2D film to 3D after you've shot it...

Now turn the page for our exclusive in-depth review of Samsung's 40in 3DTV!



Football crazy: Andy Gray and Richard Keys model Sky's spectacles of choice



Swords and scandals: *Clash of the Titans* has been shot flat and converted to 3D in post-production



The movie director

The Firm's Nick Love gives his opinion on 3D

As director or producer, you must be keen to make a film in 3D...



'We've already made one. My company has made a 3D street dance movie [*Streetdance 3D*]. And we've bought into a company called Paradise, which owns 3D/stereoscopic cameras. *The Sweeney* [Love's next film] won't be done in 3D, but the other film I'm planning on doing, that will. I think it's absolutely the future.'

Do you genuinely think it is going to take over?



'I think that things like *Avatar* have been really important for the development of the format. Regardless of what I actually thought of the film, I think that the technology and the excitement that it's causing is real. I don't think that it's fly-by-night. I don't think that you can make an 18-certificate film – you've got to make a 15 and below. But I think it's real, yeah. I think it's stunning!'

We've seen the trailer for *Streetdance 3D* – it was used on a loop at CES by LG to show off its 3DTVs...



'Brilliant. I'm a producer on that film – it comes out in May [from Vertigo Films]. But what you can see briefly on the trailer is that it's not a fantasy film. It's London. It's contemporary. It's kids dancing. And it's in 3D. It doesn't make you think, 'Why are you making a normal film in 3D?' It doesn't have to be *Up* or *Avatar*. And actually, what it makes you do is say, "F*** me, I've never seen London look like that before." It looks incredible.'

You do get a sense of depth with the dance troupes leaping around and out of the screen...



'Yeah, I think it's going to be big news. I think it's going to be the film that runs away, actually. 3D is really making filmmakers sit up and take notice now. What happens with filmmakers generally – they're such old traditionalists – they don't want to shoot anything on hi-def, they don't want to shoot anything in 3D. But I think you're going to get left behind if you don't think about these new things that are happening.'

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES 1080p24
3D Ready: YES glasses not included, though
Digital TV tuner: YES Freeview HD tuner
Component video: YES one set
HDMI: YES 4 x v1.4
PC input: NO through HDMI only
Sound: 2 x 10W speakers
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Contrast ratio (claimed): 'Mega'
Dimensions (without stand): 957(w) x 579(h) x 27(d)mm
Weight (without stand): 13kg
Features: 200Hz Motion Plus; PVR ready; Internet@TV (appstore); MoIP; Skype; Ultra Clear Panel; Allshare (DLNA); Wi-Fi ready



Samsung has designed a desktop stand that matches the 40C7000's sleek looks



Three is the magic number

So then... It's here! Europe's first 3DTV has arrived in the HCC offices and **Rik Henderson** gets so excited he almost bursts...



**1st
3DTV
on
test!**

There's no doubting 2010's buzzword in gadgetry: Apple's iPad. It's all iPad this, iPad that. Look at the size of my apps, look how you can read iBooks on my iPad. Blah, blah, blah.

In the world of home cinema we're less concerned with the iPad. Not because we don't think it's cool and won't make an impact on the custom install market (it will – see page 10), but because we're got our own buzzword to shout – 3D. You can expect to see a 3D badge plastered on any major-brand flatpanel worth its salt from April-on. Whether you want it or not is irrelevant.

Panasonic, Sony and LG have all got 3D sets coming out over the next few months, but it's Samsung that will be the first to market with its offerings. The Korean giant will release the C7000 and C8000 series LED TVs in the latter half of April (the flagship C9000 is expected later in the Summer), and HCC just so happens to have got it hands on one.

Or rather, two: there are currently only pre-production versions of the C7000 series TV in circulation – and don't let anybody tell you otherwise – so Samsung has provided us with two samples of its 40C7000; one engineering and one marketing. Neither is 100 per cent finished, and both differ in the amount of features and firmware they currently tout, but taken together they give an accurate impression of the final set. They're certainly good enough to aid a valid

opinion, but we decided not to test them in our Tech Labs, as some of the metered results may be misleading.

Preamble over. On with the show...

More than meets the eye

Naturally, the C7000's major USP is its 3D prowess – that's what's been drawing crowds from other areas of the building into our testing room (we should've charged an entry fee) – but there's so much more on offer than the ability to display 3D content.

Like the 7000 and 8000 series TVs last year, this flatpanel is exactly that – flat. A footprint of 27mm makes the C7000 a perfect suitor for wall-mounting. The new desktop stand is understated enough, though, should you set it on furniture. It's certainly a looker.

However, pretty as it may be, there are downsides to a size '0' waistline. With very slim speaker drivers being employed, you're essentially swapping acoustics for aesthetics. And, while this is an LED set, its backlight is side-firing rather than rear, so can't perform any local dimming duties. These are minor issues, though; any self-respecting home cinema nut will have an amp and 5.1 setup, and the black levels on show here are as good as many rear-firing rivals thanks to Samsung's improved filtering system.

Another feature that has been bettered this year is Samsung's 'net service. Essentially, the company has ditched its under-served,

AV/CV

Product: Samsung's first 3DTV – an LED screen with 200Hz picture processing

Position: At the bottom of Samsung's 3D LED pile (under the C8000 and C9000 series screens)

Peers: None currently available, but 3DTVs from Panasonic, LG and Sony are on the way

cumbersome widget-led user-interface and opted for a proprietary app format. In fact, it has been so dramatically revamped that it's an entirely new proposition altogether, and rivals 3D functionality as the C7000's stand-out feature.

Like with an iPhone, you can download apps (free ones to begin with, paid-for ones appearing as the store expands later in the year), which then sit in a well-designed menu system. They will allow you to access all manner of web-based activities. Alongside traditional weather, YouTube and news-feed applications, there are also ones for video-on-demand services LoveFilm, Muzu (music videos) and the Beeb's iPlayer. At present, all VOD content will be in standard-def, while the suppliers wait for our broadband speeds to increase, but the set has the ability to play HD streams if they become available later.

DLNA media streaming also makes use of the Ethernet socket (or Wi-Fi, via a dongle plugged into one of the two USB 2.0 ports), and a whole host of file types can be read – including HD video files such as mkv. Additionally, the same files can be played from a USB stick or portable hard drive via USB. But there's actually a better reason to attach external memory... This TV has record functionality.

Although there's only one Freeview HD tuner (yep, it can receive DVB-T2 transmissions in areas that >



Depth charge:

The 3D effect with *Monsters vs Aliens* is good – but would benefit from a larger screen

have been enabled), you can record programmes onto a separate HDD or memory stick. You can't watch one channel while recording another, but it's a handy feature for those who like to keep the clutter in their kit rack to a minimum. The C7000 can also pause and rewind live TV, but you will need a device with a decent amount of storage as, although it records in compressed MPEG-4, it still takes up a fair chunk for a full show. Obviously, HD content takes up even more.

In all other senses, it's a standard Samsung TV – which is a massive compliment considering the quality of its bedfellows. Full calibration controls are present, and it features Samsung's 200Hz processing engine.

Monster mash

While the 40C7000 will be compatible with Sky's 3D broadcasts, they're not actually on yet. Luckily, then, Samsung provided a **3D Blu-ray copy of *Monsters vs Aliens*** and its own 3D BD deck, the C6900, for us to test this screen with.

DreamWorks' animation is not the most rounded of experiences and it would be wrong to judge the effect from simply viewing one movie. I must admit, though, that while some sequences looked stunning, the sense of depth just isn't as pronounced as with, say, *Avatar* in the cinema.

I think this is partly because of the film itself, which errs on the side of caution with its 3D encoding, and because it's hard to get an immersive experience on a 40in set. Having seen larger models at CES, I think that the

effect is far more involving on a 46in screen or above. Yes, the 3D impact is definitely improved by sitting closer to the screen, but that could cause headaches over a prolonged period of time.

I'd recommend using the TV's 200Hz processing with 3D: when it is off during 3D-viewing, the background of scenes can judder, bringing you out of the film with a bump. But switched on, it palpably adds depth and keeps objects running smoothly.

I'd also suggest you give the 2D-to-3D conversion a try, Samsung's on-board encoding that takes any two-dimensional feed (football, DVDs, *EastEnders*, et al) and converts it to pseudo 3D. It works, sort of. Certainly, some content looks better than others – sport comes out the best – but it'll be one of the first features you'll show off to your mates.

And that's the rub. The 3D-functionality is, at present, little more than a showpiece feature. It's an expensive one, to boot (see box-out about the glasses), and considering that there's little content expected to hit stores any time soon, it would seem churlish to invest so much in a 3DTV for just this ability.

Instead, the 40C7000 should be seen as a fantastic TV that just happens to comply with the current vogue, and is thus as futureproof as they come, even if I feel you might ultimately make more use of its app store than its fancy three-dimensional talents...●



THE SPEX SPECS

To accompany the company's 3DTV ranges, and thus the 40C7000, Samsung has two types of 3D glasses on offer. At £100 a pair, the battery-powered shuttered-lens spex are the cheapest option, and they last for 50 hours of constant use before requiring a new cell. Rechargeable versions will retail for £150 a pair. Neither are bundled with the set.

You can, though, buy the battery-powered ones bundled with the Blu-ray edition of *Monsters vs Aliens* (currently the only way to get hold of the film, which is a Samsung exclusive for the foreseeable future). This pack contains the disc and two pairs of the spex for £250. Of course, the mathematicians amongst you will suss out that the Blu-ray movie will therefore cost a whopping £50, but that's early adoption for you...



HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE-40C7000
£1,800 Approx

Highs: Superb picture quality; 3D; great web apps

Lows: Weak sound; doesn't come with 3D glasses

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The image shows five Eclipse TD speakers arranged in two rows: two in the top row and three in the bottom row. They are black, spherical, and have a glossy finish. Each speaker has a silver-colored grille and is mounted on a silver-colored stand. The background is dark, and the speakers are reflected on the surface they are sitting on.

However good it looks,
it can sound a whole lot better.

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However stunning HDTV's and Blu-Ray's visual qualities, without Eclipse TD technology, you can't enjoy all the breathtaking detail, texture and quality of their lossless audio formats. But together, you experience sensational sound to match whatever it is you want to see. Enjoy High Definition a whole lot more and make sure you hear it a whole lot better. Visit www.eclipse-td.net.

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Seeing is believing

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How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that suits you? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer.

This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity”

Home cinema

LISTED HERE ARE
20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS
IN THE COUNTRY.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to

its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

system?..

...Ask the experts



OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

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33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

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020 8943 3530

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01892 535007

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N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

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SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

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020 7924 2040

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

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MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

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Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

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Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI

441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.

0131 555 3963

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO

135 Great Western Road.

0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.



Anton van Beek charts the rise and rise of a Hollywood outsider

Johnny be good

What a Wonka:
Depp starred in
*Charlie and the
Chocolate
Factory*



It's hard to imagine any *HCC* reader not owning at least one Johnny Depp movie. From big budget blockbusters (*Pirates of the Caribbean*), to serious dramas (*Public Enemies*) and rom-coms (*Benny and Joon*), Depp has tried his hand at every genre imaginable, and – for the most part – lived up to his reputation as one of the best actors of his generation.

Not that this always looked likely to happen. In the 1980s, Depp had supporting roles in movies like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Platoon*, but only shot to fame as the heartthrob of TV series *21 Jump Street*. A career as a manufactured teen idol beckoned (we're looking at you, Freddie Prinze Jr.). Luckily for us, though, Depp freed himself from his contract, and went to work on projects he felt a genuine connection with instead.

That decision was justified almost immediately, with the young actor starring in 1990's *Edward Scissorhands* under the guidance of oddball filmmaker Tim Burton. Further collaborations between the two include *Ed Wood* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Clearly, Burton brings the best out of Depp's more offbeat side.

While portraying a succession of weird loners in Burton's films, Depp has branched out with

other directors, grabbing major plaudits in films as diverse as *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, *Blow* and *Donnie Brasco*. But, it always seems that he's more comfortable when playing the outsider, and nowhere is that more evident than in the character of Captain Jack Sparrow, the breakout star of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise. Here Depp's been able to go as wild as he likes – and the more audacious he gets, the more people lap it up.

Mad as a hatter

Even with this major franchise to cling onto (a fourth *Pirates...* is due next Summer), the 47-year-old doesn't seem to be treading water. He's already taken centre-stage as the Mad Hatter in the promotional material for Burton's new *Alice in Wonderland*, and will then be showing his love for Hunter S Thompson once again in an adaptation of the author's *Rum Punch* (having previously starred in Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*). A thriller opposite Angelina Jolie is also on the cards.

So whatever your taste in movies, there's guaranteed to be a Johnny Depp flick out there that will suit you. And that's reason enough to make him a Home Cinema Hero ●

Quintessential Depp... Making a splash in the first *Pirates of the Caribbean*



1 Avast me hearties!

We're first introduced to Captain Jack Sparrow in this fun homage to Buster Keaton's *The Navigator*.



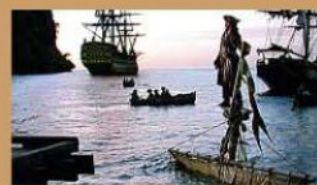
2 Splice the main brace!

Following the imposing shot of Sparrow atop a mast, we soon learn that he's only got a tiny boat...



3 Scupper that!

...and worse still, it's sprung a leak and is taking on water, forcing him to jump down and start bailing it out.



4 Shiver me timbers!

By the time he reaches the port, Sparrow is once more atop his mast, riding his sunken boat to harbour.

Must own...



Sleepy Hollow

Pathé Distribution Ltd → R2 DVD
£16 Approx

Depp took the plunge into Gothic horror in this third collaboration with director Tim Burton. Based on a classic American ghost story, *Sleepy Hollow* cast him as a young constable using frowned-upon scientific methodology to capture a headless horseman. Freaky and funny in equal measures.

30.15: While this is a deliberately dark and desaturated film, Depp's dream of his mother shows how bright and colourful the DVD's anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer can be.



Ed Wood

Walt Disney Home Entertainment
R2 DVD → £15 Approx

Easily the best of the many Depp-Burton collaborations is this tribute to the so-called 'world's worst director' Edward D. Wood Jr. While it plays fast and loose with the truth, it's also packed full of brilliant performances and beautifully-staged recreations of scenes from Wood's cinematic stinkers.

25.55: Ed gets caught dressed in an Angora sweater and lady's trousers.

105.08: There's no proof that Ed ever met Orson Welles, but who cares – this scene is utterly engrossing.



PotC: Curse of the Black Pearl

Walt Disney Home Entertainment
All-region → BD £16 Approx

Okay, the sequels were rubbish, but this first *Pirates...* flick remains a thrilling piece of popcorn cinema, and Depp's marvellous OTT performance as Jack Sparrow completely steals the film from its young stars and CGI skeletons.

123.09: Jack buckles some swashes as he takes on Barbossa in the final showdown, and becomes a CGI skeleton himself in the process – a beautifully-rendered one at that, courtesy of the AVC 1080p encode.



Donnie Brasco

Sony Pictures → All-region Extended Cut BD (US import) → £16 Approx

Undercover FBI agent Joe Pistone/Donnie Brasco infiltrates the mob, only to find himself caught between his job and his friendship with wiseguy Lefty (Al Pacino), in this compelling true-life crime-drama from director Mike Newell. Depp gives the performance of his career alongside a wonderfully subdued Al Pacino, while the story grips from the start and never lets go.

76.06: 'Forget about it'. Joe/Donnie gives two of his cop colleagues a quick refresher course in wiseguy lingo.

Worth seeing...



A Nightmare on Elm Street

Entertainment in Video → R2 Special Edition DVD → £16 Approx

Depp's bigscreen break also happened to be the debut of insomnia-inducing '80s horror icon Freddy Krueger. While Depp plays second fiddle to Freddy and heroine Nancy (Heather Langenkamp), he still makes an impact in a relatively small role and goes out with one of the film's most memorable death scenes.

65.14: When Depp falls asleep watching TV, he's pulled into his bed by Freddy. Moments later a geyser of blood erupts. So '80s! So cool!



Cry-Baby

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD
Director's Edition → £20 Approx

Long before headlining *Sweeney Todd*, Depp dipped his toes into the world of musicals by taking the title role in this outrageous comedy by trash auteur John Waters. Like a twisted version of *Grease*, this 1950s-set flick casts Depp as a juvenile delinquent whose tears drive all the girls crazy.

58.26: Being slung in jail and learning that his girl thinks he's 'a liar and a cad' gives Cry-Baby another excuse to burst into song – and show what the DVD's DD2.0 soundtrack is made of.



Edward Scissorhands

20th Century Fox → Region B BD
£23 Approx

This modern fairytale melds suburban melodrama and kooky thrills to spellbinding effect. Depp's oddball charm is perfect for the role of the naive man-made creature with scissors for hands, who is corrupted by the desires of the 'ordinary' folk who discover him.

28.45: Edward shows off his impressive topiary skills.

76.05: The BD's MPEG-2 encode ensures that the memorable ice sculpture sequence looks fantastic.



The Ninth Gate

Lionsgate → All-region BD (US Import) → £13 Approx

It should have been so good – a brilliant actor working with the director of *Rosemary's Baby* on an all-new horror thriller. But while Depp does his best, Roman Polanski's *Ninth Gate* is a turgid trawl through half-baked ideas and silly occult ceremonies, topped off by a deliriously daft finale.

124.21: Confused-looking Johnny Depp + topless Emmanuelle Seigner + burning castle = one of the least erotic sex scenes you'll ever have the misfortune to watch.

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These photos feature just a small selection of Musical Images' installation work over the past 20 years.

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INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** IMERGE Hands-on with the world's most advanced media server **DMi** Denon and Marantz add advanced control to their high-end kit **SONIC SHOCK** Protecting your bigscreen TV from thieves **MARTIN AUDIO** British brand introduces THX cinema speakers **CERTIFIED AV-HOLIC!** An *HCC* reader guides you through his home theatre stable

Bottom up build

There are plenty of benefits to building a dedicated home cinema from scratch. Turn to p42 to see just what can be achieved from nothing



World's most advanced media server

Imerge's hi-def jukebox takes home entertainment servers to the next level

The Integrated Systems Europe (ISE) show, held recently in Amsterdam, was the place to be for those interested in the scorching hot worlds of custom home theatre and home automation. Over 28,000 visitors and, of course, HCC, joined the throng. Yet if there was one pre-eminent trend at ISE 2010, it was the evolution of entertainment-based home servers. Eager to shed its image as a bland file repository, the server category is now all about funky GUIs, uPnP compatibility and living room aesthetics.

Standing out from the crowd, with its MSI-HD system, was Imerge. The brand kick-started the entertainment server market back in the '90s, and this model takes the concept to a new level.

The MSI-HD server/ripper can store and organise CDs, Blu-rays and DVD ISOs, making them available across your home network. Sleeve art is tiled across the main screen for easy browsing. Imerge employs three metadata suppliers to ensure that the maximum amount of information is collected on every item ripped into its library, making scouring your collections fun and intuitive – you can dig deeper into an artist's background and repertoire than any comparable system. For instance, in addition to trawling the back catalogue of an artist or band, you can also look for work by contributors to that album.

Choose your hard drive

The system itself comprises a front-end console, which lives under your TV, and the XiVASafe, a scalable hard drive enclosure hidden elsewhere on your network. A number of hard drive capacities are available: the XS2i is the entry-level 2TB package; stepping up is the XiVASafe XS6i, which has 6TB of storage and runs in a RAID 6 configuration. A monster 12TB version is also available – and you can even scale up from that! Multiple redundancy (back up) means you'll never lose your content to a hard drive failure.



At the show, Imerge also revealed to HCC that it will shortly be opening an online music store. This will be accessed from within the MSI-HD GUI, making browsing new music a snap. Included in the options is a 'complete my collection' feature, which allows you to investigate an artist's entire discography and then buy some or all of their back catalogue.

The system will be supplied by a dealer with all the relevant ripping software installed. All you need to do is pop in your BD, DVD or CD to add it to your library. Although the Blu-ray AACS specification now mandates Managed Copy, designed to allow owners of BD discs to make a file copy of a movie for their own use, no hardware or software has been introduced which supports this. However, Imerge says that it will enable Managed Copy support on the device with a firmware update as and when discs appear. As it stands, ripped discs, both DVD and Blu-ray, maintain their original playback profile when on the system. The menus are transferred intact as is most of the normal disc functionality. The only caveat is that BD-Live extras cease to work.

Prices start from around £8,000.

Art cinema: All available material is ripped to your library, including sleeve art

The MSI-HD: Now cultured enough to sit proudly in your living room



Stop, thief!



If you want to protect your bigscreen TV, Shock Anti Theft Alarms may have the perfect solution. Its

system comprises a discrete Shock Box Alarm module which can be attached to the back of any flatscreen or PJ. When disturbed, the alarm emits a piercing 117dB shriek certain to perturb any perp. It comes with a mounting key comprising a 1.9mm-thick steel plate and 'plastic welder' adhesive capable of resisting 3,500 psi of pressure. Battery life is claimed to be more than five years. More details at www.sonicshock.eu.

Fully-realised 3D



The Apollo Wall 3D Photorealistic Visualisation system demonstrated by British-based HoloVis

International wowed ISE-goers. Unlike regular 3D projection, this system allows the viewer to move within a 3D image as if it was an actual construct. The position of the 3D spectacles (and the wearer) is tracked by sensors around the screen, and the image alters accordingly. The system is designed for advanced CadCam work, but we'd love it to see it brought to the home entertainment world.

THX Britain



We tend to rate THX-certified speaker systems at HCC, but they typically only come from the US or

German brands. So it was with some interest that we discovered pro-grade THX systems on sale from Martin Audio of High Wycombe. This UK operation has been installing its THX-certified cinema kit into smaller cinemas and other venues for some time. The big-box speakers are reminiscent of JBL's legendary Synthesis system, but at far more affordable prices. Visit www.martin-audio.com for more.

Next-gen tweaks



Calibre UK has been offering highly specified video processors on the custom install/CEDIA

circuit for some years now. At ISE it unveiled two interesting new processors built around the Silicon Optix Realta chipset. The HQV420 unit optimises images for projection on large curved screens, which need precise manipulation to maintain image integrity, while the PremierView ProHD-Digital Cinema has been designed to work with the very latest breed of digital cinema projectors.

Denon and Marantz crash CI party

High-end AV brands can now be fully automated thanks to Escient. But who is ZigBee?

AV favourites Denon and Marantz are making their move into the high-end custom installation market. Their owner, D&M, has formed a new CI division, called DMI, and is finally integrating offerings from its different brands with a variety of control solutions.

At the high-end, D&M's Escient operation now offers advanced multiroom and home automation control systems that can interface with Denon and Marantz kit, principally the astounding Denon AVR-4810 11.3 high-end AVR and the Marantz UD9004 universal Blu-ray disc player.

The drivers integrate the hardware into the Escient Zone environment with fully bi-directional communication over either Ethernet (IP) or serial (RS232) networks.

The Escient Zone system is a high-end multifunction home automation system. Typically using handheld or wall-mounted touchscreen panels (simple button press keypads are also available for cheapskates), home owners can lord it over a home entertainment system, perhaps browsing a music or video collection on a server or remotely powering-up a BD/DVD/CD player, as well as remotely controlling lighting systems, household central heating and security hardware.

For peace of mind, you can even view live feeds on the touch panels from IP cameras mounted around a home. Occupancy sensors instantly alert when movement is detected. Of course, this isn't just an advanced security feature for the paranoid. You can also keep a reassuring view on small children as they sleep or play. Despite its sophistication, the Escient Zone interface is very intuitive to use, with simple understandable graphics for each area.

Intriguingly, more affordable integrated systems are also on the cards, thanks largely to DMI's adoption of ZigBee, an open standard of wireless interoperability between all manner of product types.



ZigBee-enabled kit is heading our way, says Marantz's UK MD Jason Dear

ZigBee-enabled kit can range from a modest but cool door-locking system that uses

a wireless key rather than a physical one, to easily-installed multiroom audio systems. Exactly what ZigBee-compliant kit is on the market is not yet clear (the brand has done less than nothing to communicate about either its technology or hardware partnerships), but Marantz UK MD Jason Dear told HCC: 'It's a great system that is increasingly being used to bring sophisticated smarthome technologies to a wider audience.'

Denon hardware that can now be automated on an IP network comprises the DBP-4010UDCI Blu-ray player, the AVR-3310, AVR-4310 and AVR-4810 receivers, and the TU604CI multi-tuner and POA3012CI multi-amp.

Serial network integration is provided for the Denon DBP-4010UDCI, DVD-A1UDCI, DBP-2010CI, and Marantz's BD7004, BD8002, UD8004 and UD9004 Blu-ray players; and the Denon AVR-AVR-2310, AVR-3310, AVR-4310 and AVR-4810 receivers. DMI is also developing Zone drivers for the Marantz AV8003, SR6004 and SR5004 AV receivers.



Complete control: The Escient Zone touchscreen handset

New arrival: Marantz's UD9004 Blu-ray player can now be integrated into an Escient Zone system



Bottom up build

Anton van Beek discovers the benefits of creating a home cinema from scratch



Kit Checklist

SIM2: Domino D60 Full HD DLP projector
Screen Research: ClearPix2 110in acoustically-transparent projector screen
Bowers & Wilkins: 7 x CWM 8180 three-way in-wall speakers with Accusteel-lined back boxes
Bowers & Wilkins: 2 x CT SW12 12in subwoofers
Arcam: FMJ AV888 pre-amp processor
Arcam: P777 power amplifier
Microsoft: Xbox 360 Elite console
Sony: PlayStation3 Slim and PlayStation2 consoles
Control4: HC-300 home controller with SR-250 remote
Rako: Lighting system
DSE: Custom-made cabinet
Signature: Home cinema seating

Complete soundproofing means that this purpose-built cinema shouldn't annoy the neighbours



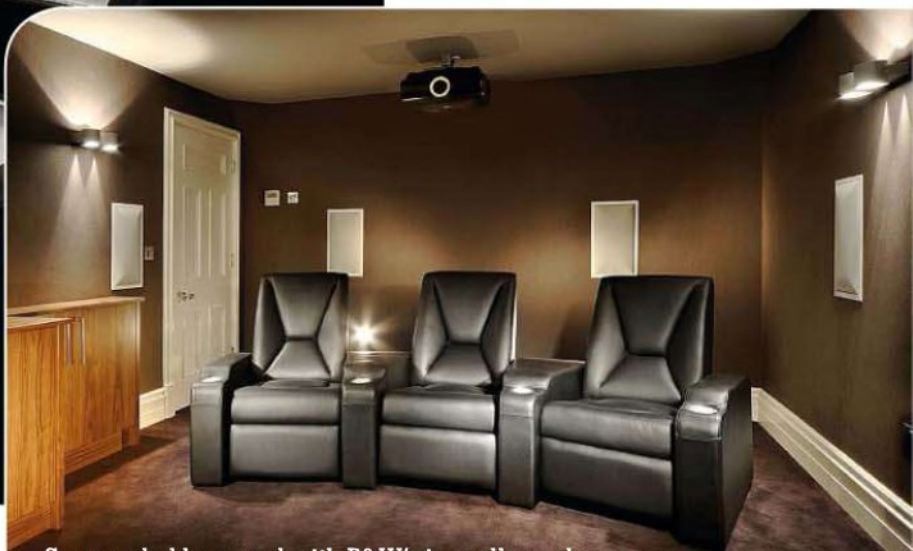
Gateshead-based pro-install and smarthome specialist DSE Group found an ideal showcase for its AV knowhow with this latest project. Rather than retrofitting an existing space, the company was called in early to help plan and construct a purpose-built extension to house a dedicated home cinema.

This approach has its benefits. For instance, because the installer was heavily involved in the building work from the start, it meant it was able to totally soundproof the cinema by lining all of the walls with Accusteel, a sound-damping material used by the likes of Bowers & Wilkins and Arcam in their back boxes and steel cases.

In fact, a ground-up project like this meant very little in the way of problems to overcome. The biggest challenge was finding a way to ventilate the sealed room. 'We had to put in intake and extraction air distribution and air conditioning for those two hot days of Summer we get in this country,' explains DSE's Dave Slater.

The budget of around £30,000 was sufficient to spec a generous system, with room-filling 7.2-channel audio (a must for the audiophile owner) and a SIM2 Full HD projector. The one missing element is a dedicated Blu-ray deck; a PS3 currently fills the role. The owner is waiting for Arcam to release its own BD-spinner, so he can pair it with the Arcam pre-power amp combi.

System navigation comes via a Control4 HC-300 controller, partly because the rest of the house already has multiroom audio and HD distribution using the system. The sleek, stylish nature of the room is completed by custom-designed cabinets, Rako lighting, and the use of in-wall speakers.



Surrounded by sound with B&W's in-wall speakers

44 INSTALLS

A Black beauty

When choosing the right projector for the budget they were working to, DSE's installers opted for SIM2's Domino D60: 'The picture is awesome for the price point'

B Wired for sound

This diagram details the various types of cabling that had to be used through the cinema room, including CAT5

C Playing around

The owner is clearly a big fan of videogames, as the room features an Xbox 360, PS3 and even an old-school PS2!

D One-stop shop

One stop shop
The Control4 HC-300 unit means that everything, from the AV kit to lighting, can be controlled via one remote handset

E Power pack

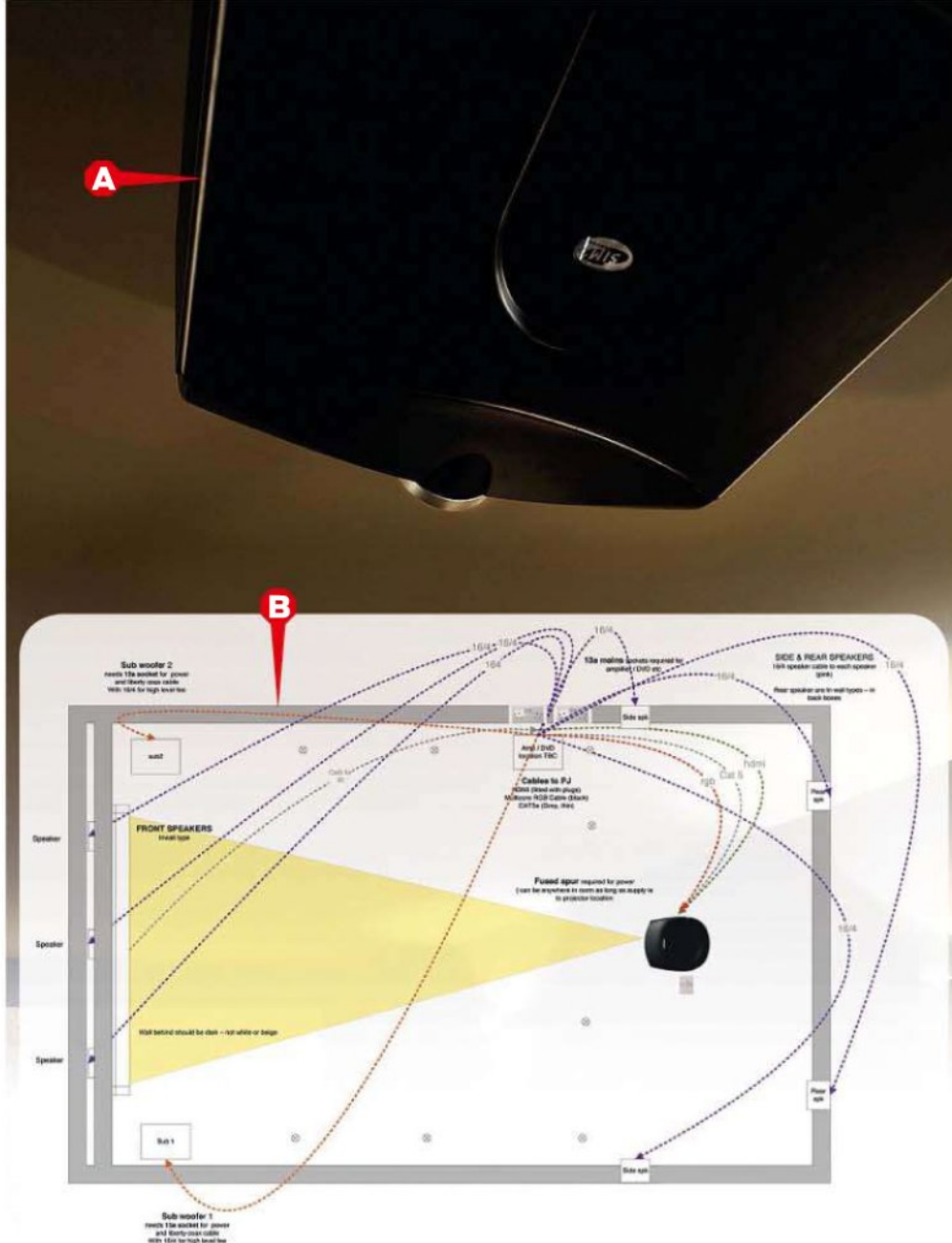
High-end sonic excellence is ensured, thanks to this Arcam FMJ AV888 pre-amp processor partnered with the company's matching P777 power amp

F Hidden audio

Bowers & Wilkins in-wall CWM 8180 speakers are used for all seven channels in the surround system

G Sit back and relax

For the ultimate in comfort while using the room, the owner has three electronic reclining chairs from cinema seating specialist Signature



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Many of us wish we had a dedicated room for home cinema. More often than not our movie-viewing is crammed into the living room, and subject to a variety of domestic compromises, both physical ones and those required to keep the peace with the family. So if you have some land, several acres of Sussex farmland in John Stedmans' case, don't just dream of a dedicated cinema room – build yourself a dedicated building!

If the accompanying pictures look like another money-no-object custom install for some well-heeled banker – think again. John is enjoying his retirement, has completed all the décor work himself and has sourced everything from the amplifier to the chairs second hand. In fact, the interior of this jaw-dropping home cinema, reminiscent of 1940s cinema at its best, cost John less than £1,000: all 18 chairs were sourced through eBay and refurbished by John's son; the woodwork, plastering and paintwork is all by John's own hand. The trim detail is inspired. Those lush gold 'wrought-iron' looking panels are actually rubber door mats with a lick of gold spray paint. Clever.

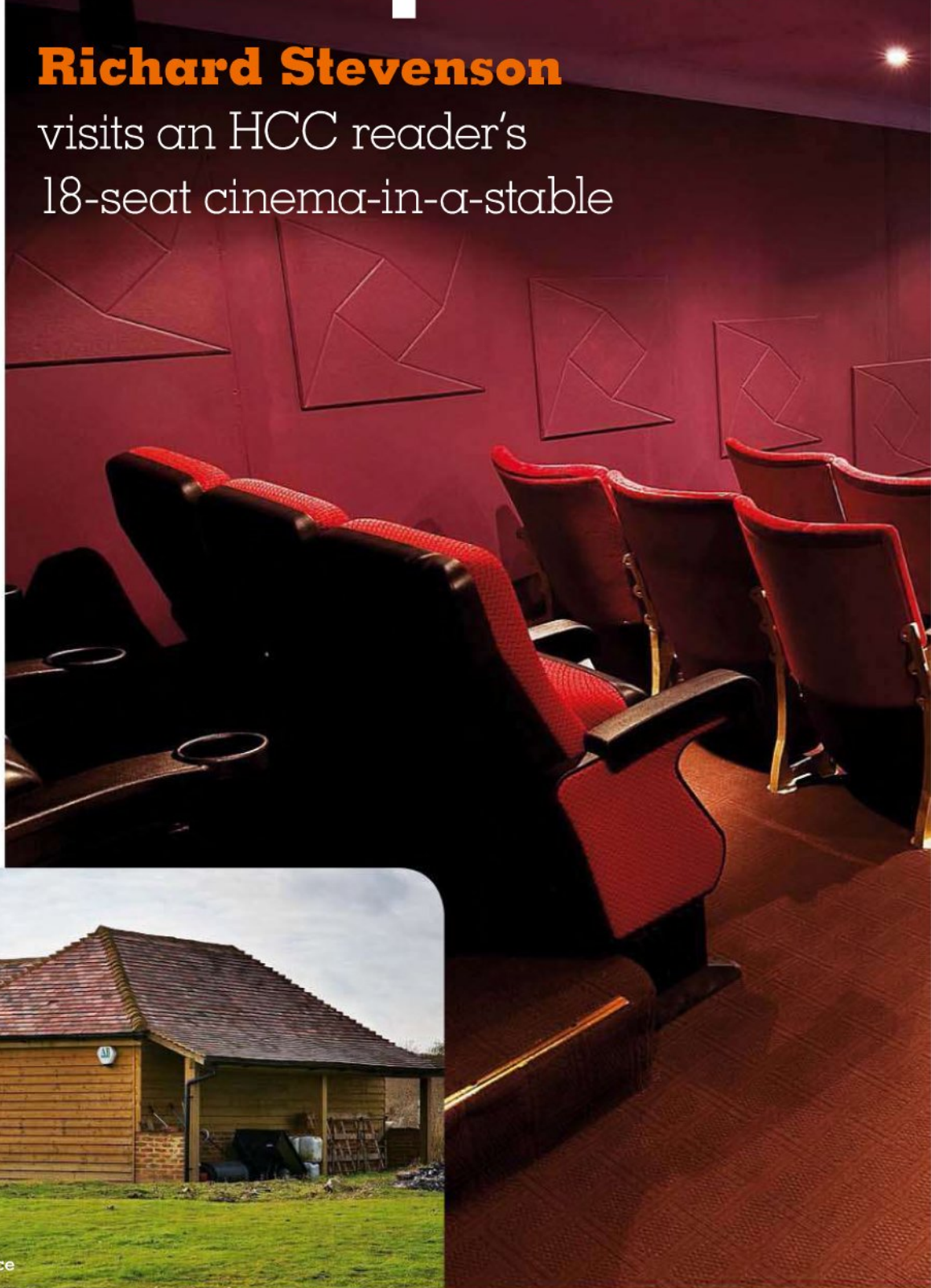
Starting from scratch

The largest investment was the building itself, which was completed last Summer. This sizeable wooden-built structure has been designed to look like a stable block to keep both the local council and his wife happy. Built from scratch by a carpenter, the building (including planning permission, the base, timber construction and the pitch-tile roof) came in at £17,000. Not bad for a 7.8 x 3.75m cinema room with an entrance lobby, plus two 4m x 4m loose boxes (which are horsey >

Hi-def horsepower

Richard Stevenson

visits an HCC reader's
18-seat cinema-in-a-stable



The outside of John's movie palace

Kit Checklist

Sanyo: PLV-Z700 Full HD projector
 DRH: Fixed-frame 200in projector screen
 Sony: STR-900 AVR
 Sony: 5.1 S8-MS7 speaker system
 Sony: BDP-S350 Blu-ray player
 Toshiba: XD-E500 DVD player
 Tannoy: 1 x EFX 100W subwoofer
 Bowers & Wilkins: LCR3 centre speaker



The cinema room boasts a red-infused retro design

50 INSTALLS

dwelling's apparently) and a pretty, external log-store.

As you walk into the cinema room, you can't help but be impressed by the whole ambience. The space is insulated and lined with acoustic wall-board (a heavyweight plasterboard) and the rear half of the floor slopes up gently towards the back of the room. This nice touch actually came about by necessity, as the genuine cinema chairs require a 10 degree raised floor to remain upright. There are three distinct eras of chairs among the 18 seats, so John is keeping an eye out for more of the true 1940s' classics. Heating comes from wall-panel radiators; cooling by a forced air duct.

At the rear of the room is the projectionist's den. Not only does this keep any noise from the projector at bay, it allows John to control all internal lighting, and to cue-up films from the multiple players. The only thing missing is a young lady with an ice-cream tray for the interval – but John assures me he is keeping an eye on eBay for that, too.

Equipment-wise, the budget has gone almost exclusively on getting the picture right. The projector is a Sanyo PLV-Z700, a 1080p LCD model with a massively long-throw lens that has allowed the projector to be placed well back in the den. The DRH fixed frame screen is 16:9 ratio and 3m wide to give a diagonal viewing size of over 200in. As the screen's aluminium stretchers came in one piece, construction of one wall had to be delayed pending its arrival. Watching a clip from *Madagascar* on Blu-ray, the sheer acreage of the 1080p picture and the room's true cinema feel are an absolute joy.

Value for money

The sound system, by John's own admission, is trailing-edge, so has plenty of potential for future upgrade. In fact, the second-hand Sony STR-DB940 receiver, some Sony 5.1 pod speakers I could not even identify, and a Tannoy sub that Noah might have had in the Ark, cost John a grand total of just £100!

Source components include a Sony BDP-S350 Blu-ray and a Toshiba XD-E500 for upscaling DVDs. A recent addition is a small B&W centre speaker to improve the dialogue – second-hand from eBay, of course. Sonically, it does the job, and most visitors are so awed by the setting and huge picture that a few compromises on sound can be easily overlooked.



All smiles:

John and his wife Bev are enjoying regular bigscreen nights in their new dedicated cinema



A Scaling the heights

In the projection room at the back of the cinema, John runs his standard-definition DVDs through this upscaling Toshiba XD-E500

B Solo Sony

A Sony BDP-S350 caters solely for hi-def Blu-rays, delivering 1080p images to the Full HD Sanyo PLV-Z700 projector

C Bargain bagger

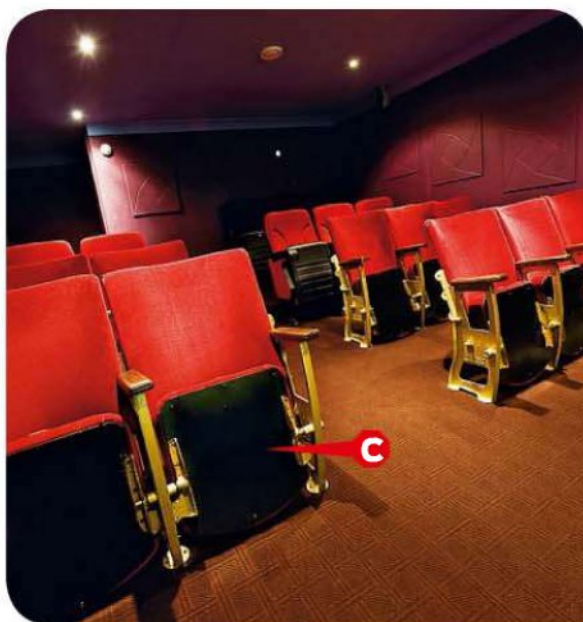
All 18 seats were acquired via eBay, and given new lustre by John's son. A ten-degree slope was required in the room to accommodate the cinema seats' natural tilt

D Behind the scenes

This grille cloth currently hides Sony pod loudspeakers, but the false wall is ideal for proper in-wall speakers in the future

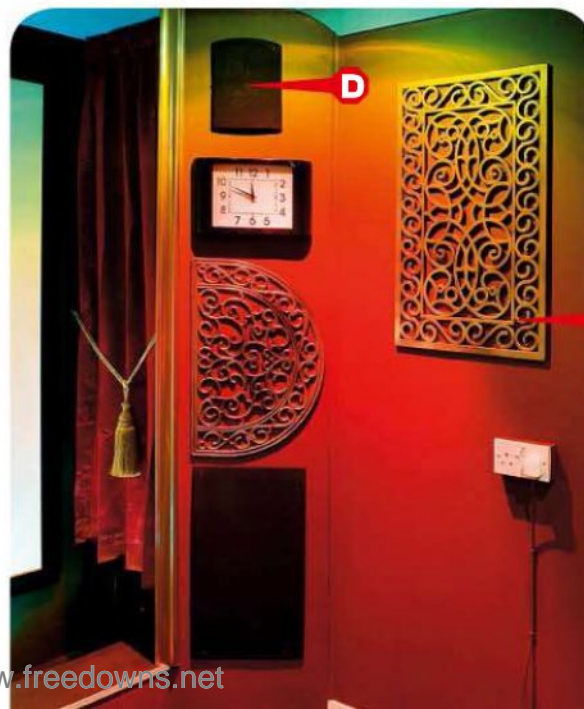
E Wipe your feet?

The authentic 1940s-looking gold coloured wrought-ironwork fixtures are actually rubber door mats and spray paint!



This hobby room will remain a work in progress, and John has a list of tweaks and changes on the horizon while enjoying his extensive collection of DVDs and Blu-ray movies along the way.

So is there anything he would do differently? 'Not at all,' is the answer. The building itself is perfect, and any other internal updates, tweaks and equipment upgrades can be integrated when time and finances allow. Best of all, the whole cinema is very much appreciated by John's growing army of friends that come around on Friday and Saturday evenings for big-screen viewings. This week's 'Now Showing' is a Harry Potter-a-thon, so I might just pop down for another look... ●



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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** HUMAX First ever Freeview HD set-top box arrives
 ONKYO Flagship 9.2-channel networkable AVR PANASONIC Next-gen wireless Blu-ray player
 KLIPSCH Mid-range 5.1 system with horn tweeter technology IMERGE Living room-friendly CD ripper
 GROUPTEST The UK's most-wanted flatscreen TVs reviewed **AND MUCH MORE!**



White lightning

Epson returns with a new Full HD projector. Can it claim the bigscreen cinema crown? See p74

HCC Ratings key					
Outstanding	1	2	3	4	5
Above average	1	2	3	4	5
Acceptable	1	2	3	4	5
Disappointing	1	2	3	4	5
Dire	1	2	3	4	5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT, IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

wonders if there's anything
Onkyo's TX-NR5007 can't do

Top of that list is nine channels of amplification. Not only is this easily >

Peers:
Denon
AVR-4810;
Pioneer
SC-LX82;
Yamaha DSP-Z7

Dolby True HD: YES and Dolby Pro-Logic IIz
DTS HD Master Audio: YES and DTS ES 6.1 Discrete
THX: YES Ultra2 Plus
Multichannel audio: YES 9x 220W
Multichannel input: YES 7x1 phono
Multiroom: YES main plus 2 zones
AV inputs: YES 4x S-video, 5x phono audio, 7x digital audio (3x coaxial, 4x optical)
HDMI input/output: YES 8-in, 2-out
Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Component: YES 3-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 435(w) x 198(h) x 463(d)mm
Weight: 25kg
Features: Audyssey DSX/ Dynamic Volume and Dynamic EQ; DAB radio via optional dock; RHD remote; 32bit DACs/DSPs; colour coded outputs; bi-amping and bridged power options; turntable output; DSD direct for SACD; HQV Reon-VX video engine; FM/AM and vTuner; Audyssey MultEQ XT RoomEQ; 2x USB; iPod dock via universal port; Ethernet; RS-232



Onkyo's top-flight receiver weighs a hefty 25kg





configurable as a powered multiroom system (eg 5.1 + 2 zones of stereo), it also allows bi-amping or bridging of main channels for better audio performance – and still has enough juice for a powered stereo zone. However, the real magic of all those power channels is revealed when mated to the Onkyo's excellent Dolby Pro-Logic IIz and Audyssey DSX processing, as this AVR allows full 7.1 plus equal power for height or width channels. In fact, you can even set it up as 5.1 with both height AND width channels – something which I have done and can heartily recommend. Of course, you lose the rear back channels, and sadly Onkyo has missed a trick on the TX-NR5007 by not offering full 7.1 plus height and width channels (ie 11.1). This could have been achieved with a line level pre-output for a small stereo power amp for those last two channels. One up for Denon's competing AVR 4810, which does just that.

Thankfully, the NR5007 is not just about the number of channels, it's about the number of bits as well – all 32 of them. Its main processing engine is a trio of TI Aureus 32bit DSP chipsets and there is a whole suite of Burr-Brown 196kHz/32bit DACs to turn the post-processed data streams for each channel into precision analogue sound. The highest of high-tech continues on the

Hi-def heaven:

With seven HDMI inputs on its back panel, the TX-NR5007 can cater for all your hi-def needs

video side, with Silicon Optix's Reon-VX engine and the excellent ISF (Imaging Science Foundation) video calibration for every input source.

In terms of processing, Onkyo has all the Dolby and DTS marques covered including Dolby Volume. It also sports the full Audyssey gamut with MultEQ auto set-up and room EQ, DSX, Dynamic Volume and Audyssey Dynamic EQ. The latter is a system for correcting the room EQ relative to the overall volume and the dynamic range of the material in real time. It gives me a headache just thinking about how complex the processing for that must be.

What won't give you a headache is the wonderful GUI, and intuitive ease of use, day-in and day-out. Onkyo has absolutely nailed the TX-NR5007's interface. It's bold, bright, informative, logical and, best of all, offers excellent text descriptions for every feature, function and setting. **It's hands down the best GUI on any flagship receiver to date** and pretty much consigns its own *Yellow Pages*-sized instructional manual to the recycling bin.

Phasers on stun

With the new *Star Trek* Blu-ray yet again called into action (if you don't own this yet, put the mag down and go and buy it), I put the Onkyo

through its paces, and found that from the outset, this is a receiver that is supremely surefooted and blessed with a remarkably even balance. The bass is deep and potent without being overbearing; the mid-range is wide open and richly detailed and the top-end is smooth and sophisticated. This is the sort of balance that will thrill without offending, no matter what the volume, so it seemed only right to give it a handful.

As Kirk (senior) steers his ship into an inevitable head-on collision in the opening sequence, the Onkyo lights up the room with a huge, immersive festival of sound and effects. Opting for 7.1 plus DLP IIz Height, the soundstage reaches intergalactic proportions and the sheer visceral impact will put a smile on any action movie fan's face. That is a true Onkyo character, but what separates the manly TX-NR5007 from the boys lower down the company's range is the subtlety and uncanny level of detailing. Dialogue is so very natural with no forced sibilance or boom, and small ambient effects like the sheer scale of the hangers is rendered in the audio equivalent of 3D.

Whack up the volume as planet Vulcan crumbles and you're rewarded with a sweeping increase in scale and dynamics. Explosions have real edgy impact and the falling rubble as the temple collapses is so



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something electrical"*

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dabs.com customer comment

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Making the flagship fly

HCC quizzed Onkyo's European Product Manager, **Nick Hamada**, on the thinking behind some of the TX-NR5007's technical innovations

Nine amplified channels? Is that simply 'out-trumping' the seven-channel competition?

The main reason for nine-channel amplification is for future-proofing and guaranteeing versatility in the HD era. Dolby Pro-Logic IIz is regarded as a format variant like Dolby Digital and we'll be seeing BD or gaming content that will support nine-channel PLIIz in the future. The TX-NR5007 will be ready for this. While nine-channel audio may be too much for most of our customers right now they can also choose to use seven channels, and opt for front speaker bi-amping, front BTL (Bridged Transformerless) mode or powered multiroom functionality. But, of course, for high-end customers, deploying PLIIz and DSX certainly expands the opportunities to enjoy more realistic and exciting sound.

How important is ISF calibration?

ISF Calibration was originally aimed at professional installers, allowing them to optimise picture quality for all video devices on an individual basis. We conducted research into how to achieve the best picture quality via our receivers and reached an inescapable conclusion that tailoring each video source individually is vital. Each customer's experience is different because of their equipment, their environment and the colour perception of their eyes, for example. If you're really serious about picture quality you have to adjust and calibrate each source individually (ultimately, one needs to adjust disc-by-disc but that's still a way off yet!). Standard HQV output is fantastic, but without ISF a user has to accept a maker's best shot at

defining what constitutes the best picture quality.

Why did you opt for the Realta HQV Reon VX engine?

HQV is based on Hollywood studio technologies and Silicon Optix injects a lot of unseen experience and know-how into its product, advantages that can't be read off a specification sheet. At Onkyo, we had to physically test every video processor on the market one by one before we made our choice. It took quite a while but we had some fun!

In the end we chose Reon VX because it clearly did the best job with moving video... it's as simple as that. Yes, there are cheaper solutions but performance-wise they don't come close. Remember, it's not just the chip that costs more. Reon VX must be used in conjunction with four external DDR memories for it to work. That further raises the cost but the end result is a categorically more effective solution when it comes to delivering top quality video.

What are the advantages of 32bit DSP and 32bit DACs?

Our triple DSP chips are digital workhorses that have to handle audio decoding, all the post processing like THX, PLIIz, Audyssey EQ, as well as networking functionality. DSP represents intelligence in AV receivers, and 32bit DSP is simply smarter and better. The 32bit DACs are more about future-proofing as well as performance. New 24bit sources are appearing every day and recording studios already record master tape in 24bit, so that's pretty much today's

standard. We are always looking at what's on the horizon and we're pretty sure that 32bit sources will come to the market soon. Not only does over-specifying our hardware mean that our customers are prepared for the future, it means we can also decode 24bit digital audio signals more precisely, too.

Why did you choose custom transistors for the TX-NR5007?

The amplifier stage is one of the most important parts of an AVR and we chose custom transistors for two main reasons. Firstly, we needed more space in order to cram in nine channels of high-quality power while keeping the enclosure reasonably sized. Secondly, we had to maintain high current delivery without the aid of the dual push-pull circuitry which we had in the previous generation products. With these custom-designed transistors we've achieved that along with an improvement in sound quality.

Finally, what are the major benefits of twin independent subwoofer outputs?

The first thing to clear up is that the twin outputs aren't there simply to double the subwoofer output level! Their function is to aid the creation of a better balanced soundstage. Conventional AVRs allow users to set up all the speakers in a room as symmetrical items, except for subs. That's a problem because subwoofers can suffer channel imbalances. With our dual output provision, Audyssey MultEQ XT is able to calibrate each sub separately and individually so customers can have a fully-balanced home cinema environment.



Onkyo's Nick Hamada said the brand tested every video processor on the market

Worth waiting for

The service has been available for a while, but finally there's a box that can play free over-the-air HD TV. **Rik Henderson** gets connected

It took a while for Freeview to dip its toe in the sparkling waters of high-definition. After all, the BBC successfully trialled over-the-air digital HD broadcasts a couple of years ago. But specification squabbles, bitrate and bandwidth issues, chipset shortages and the global recession have all gotten in the way of the launch of Freeview HD. Still, better to be late than never.

It could even be argued that, as the first to market, Humax's HD-Fox T2 isn't late at all. The set-top box specialist is, relatively-speaking, ground-breakingly early. It's managed to rush its first DVB-T2 receiver onto the market a considerable while before the competition – a move that could see it gain a foothold in living rooms before similarly specc'ed hordes roll over the hills.

Anyway, there are only three HD channels at the moment: BBC HD, and simulcast versions of ITV HD and 4HD (plus S4C HD in Wales). In addition, until this month, the compatible DVB-T2, MPEG-4 signal has only been broadcast from the Winter Hill and Crystal Palace transmitters, covering Manchester and London. So, unless you're an early-adopting Mancunian or Cockney with two hundred quid burning a hole in your pocket, and annoyed that you didn't manage to catch *The Gruffalo* in HD on Christmas Day, you most likely don't mind that the first receiver has only just reached the shops.

It streams, too!

The HD-Fox T2 may only be a receiver, with no hard drive and no

AV/CV

Product:
Freeview HD receiver

Positioning:
Humax's first Freeview HD product

Peers:
None yet

recording talents (yet), but Humax has put a lot of care and attention into its feature list in order to offer future-proofing and value for money.

To begin with, it's a half-decent media streamer, capable of playing XviD, MP3, and JPEG files stored remotely. The Ethernet port on the rear allows you to hook the box to your home network and access your media. Sadly, **there's no Wi-Fi and its file-compatibility list could be written on the back of an ant**, but for those only just getting into the world of DLNA, it provides a stress-free experience.

You can also play the same file line-up via a USB memory stick. Again, the USB 2.0 socket offers promise of further functionality at a later date, adding PVR abilities to the box (the possibility of recording video



onto an external storage device). However, this will only be enabled by a firmware update and there's no news as to when this will happen.

Setup is as easy as can be. Unlike other HDMI-sporting SD boxes I've tried of late, it will recognise that you're feeding video via the port from initial boot-up. I've often had to put a Scart lead into a set-top box first to set up the HDMI connection, but not so here. In addition, the Humax receiver whizzes its way through the channel-scanning process like a caffeinated cheetah.

Elsewhere, the Humax has the best-looking GUI I've come across – Sky and Virgin Media included. Its eight-day EPG pops up with absolutely no lag and is clean, clear and concise. Its scroll-time is also better than most.

Externally it's a looker, too. While diminutive, the fascia looks like a classy Samsung Blu-ray player, and sports a natty click pad for navigation should you mislay the remote.

As part of the setup process, you get to choose the output resolution, and that means all video will be up- (or down-) scaled to your specification. That's mostly of benefit to standard-def broadcasts, which, once upconverted to 1080p, look excellent on the HD-Fox T2. They still exhibit signs of digital transmission artefacting – that's unavoidable as blocking and picture noise generally

come from source and depend on the bitrates being used by the specific broadcaster – but are smoother and retain colour better than most general DVB-T tuners.

The upscaling also works on the 1080i broadcast images of the two HD channels currently available. However, the leap from interlaced to progressive rendering is unnoticeable. What is noticeable, though, is that there is visibly a touch more noise in the hi-def images on BBC HD in this instance than on rival pay-TV services. ITV HD is presented as a simulcast channel here for the very first time – it's only a red-button service on Freesat.

HDMI connectivity has an extra benefit other than feeding HD pictures; the HD-Fox T2's audio is precise and warm. And, when utilised by the specific channels, it is capable of feeding an AV receiver Dolby Digital 5.1 sonics, even though that doesn't happen too often.

Almost there

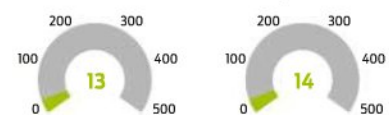
I'm definitely enamoured by the Humax, so much so that I doubt there will be many peers that offer as rich a picture experience any time soon. It's very nearly a five-star product. However, without the PVR functionality already enabled, it is lacking that final ingredient that would elevate it to higher realms. Roll on the firmware update ●

First place:

Humax has won the race to bring a Freeview HD receiver to market in the UK

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: An acceptable figure, comparable to that of a DVD player

Playing: Just a slight increase on playback from a USB stick

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: No not on this debut receiver, but the USB port should be unlocked for external recording at a later date

Tuner: Yes Freeview HD

Upscaling: Yes All resolutions up to 1080p

HDMI: Yes 1 x v1.3 output

Component: No HD from HDMI only, here

Multichannel analogue: No stereo phono only

Digital audio: Yes 1 x optical output

Dimensions: 280(w) x 200(d) x 45(h)mm

Weight: 1.42kg

Also featuring: 8-day onscreen electronic programme guide; 1080p, 1080i, 720p, 576p, 576i output; DLNA certified for network streaming; MP3, JPEG, XVID playback from USB; 2 x Scart



HCC VERDICT

Humax HD-Fox T2
£180 Approx

Highs: Free HD programming without fuss; capable network media streamer; good SD and HD pictures

Lows: PVR functionality not enabled yet; can't read HD movie files; no Wi-Fi

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Ballsy speakers with style

Cabasse's eye-catching iO2 5.1 system uses single point source technology to brilliant effect. **Jim Hill** gets himself smothered by sound

In France, speaker brand Cabasse is celebrated for its avant-garde creations, but are we Brits ready for floating tweeters and balls that balance on rare-earth magnets? Let's see...

There's actually a good reason for the spherical design and concentric drive units of Cabasse's iO2 satellite speakers: the single point source audio that it produces provides an uncoloured and direct sound beam that suits home cinema particularly well. Meanwhile, the powerful magnets mean super-fast and efficient drive units. And, I think you'll agree, the styling is *magnifique*! HCC's test sample, from UK distributor Coherent Systems, featured a black pearl finish and light oak stands; traditional pearl speakers and darker wenge wood stands are also available, and you can mix the finishes to suit.

Cabasse has also managed to keep the price of its new iO2 line relatively low – well, low for a company that makes the flagship £108,000-per-pair La Sphere speaker – and with its uniquely flexible stand-, table-, wall- and ceiling-mount options, these curvaceous cabinets could suit almost any size room.

Spatially speaking

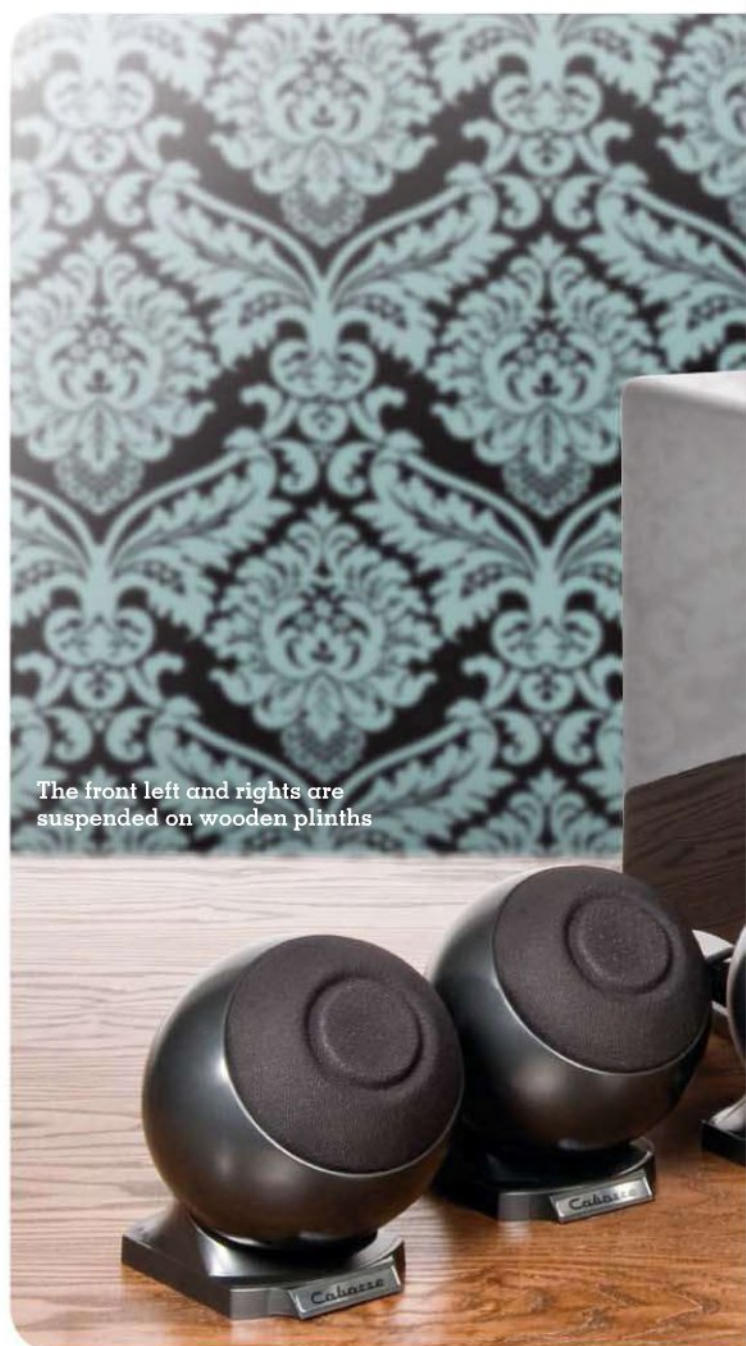
Spatially Coherent System (SCS) is the philosophy behind Cabasse's round speakers, and it all started with the legendary La Sphere. The tech has trickled down to the three-way Baltic system, and smaller two-way Eole 2 system reviewed positively in HCC #169. It's that latter solution that has been further refined and upgraded here in the iO2 package.

The result is a stylish array of five compact two-way satellites, able to deliver a remarkably spacious and punchy sound, with the more sizeable subwoofer providing a beefy low-end. It's a tonal balance that's attacking, rather than warm and mellow, which might not be to everyone's taste, but it's ideal for home cinema. Throw in the fact that the clever magnetic mounting options allow you to fit the satellites just about anywhere and you have a very flexible proposition.

The mounts are clever because they can either sit on a tabletop, or fix to the wall with a single screw. There's even an option from Cabasse for ceiling mounting. Each plastic base cups the speaker in a strong magnet, so no further attachments need to be made and there's cable management for your speaker wire.

The front pair look even more impressive, suspended in a very aerodynamic-looking chunk of wood. This stands on a wide base to avoid any chance of it toppling over.

The secret of their success lies in the spherical form factor and concentric coaxial layout of the drive units. There's no interference between mid and upper frequencies from the single point source, and if you get the positioning right, you can create a soundstage with good off-centre imaging. Where floorstanding speakers tend to have a very definite sweet spot, **the Cabasse sub/sat solution manages a tasty surround effect wherever you are** inside the five-speaker array. This is also due to the kinetic characteristics of the satellites; the



The front left and rights are suspended on wooden plinths

balls tilt and swivel in their cradles letting you find an angle that best fills the room.

I'm usually a grills-off kind of guy, but I'll make an exception in this case. Apart from wrecking the geometry, the floating tweeter arrangement behind the fabric dome looks incongruous suspended in front of the woofer on a steel rod. Aesthetics aside however, the design works. With the incisive treble detail perfectly in line with the mid-range, you get a seamless delivery across the range with very little colouration.

I found integration with the lower mid-bass and sub frequencies took a little longer to achieve. As with all sub/sat solutions, it's a case of setting the subwoofer's crossover >

AV/CV

Product:
Designer-friendly 5.1 system

Positioning:
One of Cabasse's more affordable spherical speaker products

Peers:
Tannoy Arena 5.1;
Bowers & Wilkins MT-30





10in bass bin:
Cabasse's iO2
system ships
with the
Santorin 25
subwoofer

frequency at the point where the satellites hand over the lower frequencies, and with the iO2 system that's quite high – somewhere between 120Hz-160Hz. It varies with the volume, too, so the best advice is to listen in stereo mode first at your preferred volume while tweaking the frequency and level dials. Once that's sounding smooth, to the point that you can't detect where the subwoofer is in the room with your eyes closed, then you can perform a 5.1 calibration test, ideally using a sound pressure level (SPL) meter. Cabasse recommends connecting the subwoofer via line level to the right-hand phono input and plugging it into its own mains socket rather than sharing a power block adapter.

The woofer itself, a glossy and downward-firing fellow, is a definite step up from the Santorin 21 supplied in the entry-level Eole 2 package. Again, it stands on its own plinth and is rear-ported, but has a more powerful 250W amplifier inside driving a larger 10in woofer. It reaches lower frequencies than the 21, too, and **I found it had no problem driving a large cinema room.** The trick here is tuning it to match the feisty satellite speakers.

On demand

With their 93dB sensitivity, the sats produce plenty of volume using a moderately powerful AV receiver like my Marantz SR6003, so these aren't demanding speakers. Starting in stereo mode with some classical music courtesy of Vivaldi, the 2.1 configuration shows how broad and

open the iO2s can be – strings soar and percussion hits home with a chesty thump. The trebly balance means you might want to adjust your tonal controls if you have a room with hardwood floors and a live-sounding acoustic, or you'll end up with your rock music sounding just a little too edgy.

The incisive top-end and punchy subwoofer combo definitely works better with big movie soundtracks, where the floating tweeters and intricate mid-range drivers do a fantastic job of picking out subtle surround effects and fine detail. It also brings clarity to the dialogue channel that is so important in a 5.1 setup. With the Blu-ray pressing of *District 9*, for instance, all the lines are clearly delivered, despite the film's hectic documentary style.

Meanwhile, the Santorin subwoofer generates plenty of deep-reaching low-end, so you don't miss out on any of the thunderous blasts from the hilariously powerful alien weapons. On the downside, there is a danger of losing synergy between the upper and lower frequencies if the sub isn't perfectly matched and it's a fine balance.

Exploring hidden depths

The Cabasse iO2 system delivers a coherent soundfield packed with clarity, and is capable of bringing out the detail hidden in movie soundtracks. The styling and build quality, too, is superb. But the bright, forward nature of its audio means that while I'd recommend this £4,100 setup heartily, you should get an audition first •

→ Specifications

iO2 satellites

Drive Units: Two-way coaxial driver
– 1in rigid Kaladex tweeter; 5in
Duocell driver

Enclosure: Sealed

Frequency Response: 150Hz-22kHz

Sensitivity: 93dB

Power Handling: 80W

Dimensions (off plinth): 160(w) x 160(h)
x 160(d)mm

Weight: 1.8kg

Santorin 25 subwoofer

Drive Units: 1 x 10in ICF woofer

Enclosure: Ported

Frequency Response: 34Hz-150Hz

On board power: 250W

Dimensions: 360(w) x 420(h)
x 380(d)mm

Weight: 19kg

Connections: LFE phono input; speaker
level input



HCC VERDICT

Cabasse iO2 system
£4,100 Approx

Highs: Elegant and flexible
design; agile subwoofer; good
off-centre imaging

Lows: Takes a while to set a
satisfactory crossover point; feisty
top end

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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- » 4 x HDMI Connections

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- » 3,000,000:1 Contrast
- » 4 x HDMI Connections

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- » HDMI Connection

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→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
Tuner: YES Freeview and CI slot
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES 5 v1.3a
PC input: YES D-Sub 15 pin
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 2x 15W
Brightness (claimed): 500 cd/m²
Contrast ratio (claimed): 80,000:1
Dimensions (w/o stand): 1,111(w) x 694(h) x 50(d)mm
Weight (w/o stand): 20kg
Features: 200Hz Clear LCD mode; Perfect Pixel HD engine; Ambilight Spectra 2; EasyLink HDMI CEC; USB for media playback (JPEG; MP3/WMA; DivX/AVI/MPEG1/MPEG2/MPEG4/AVC/H.264/WMV9); 2x RGB Scarts; Wi-Fi; Ethernet connection; Net TV



AV/CV

Product: 47in Full HD LCD TV

Positioning: Philips' top non-LED or 21:9 model

Peers: Samsung UE46B8000; Sony KDL-46Z5500; LG 47SL8000

Philip's high-end LCD screen is packed with processing tech and features

LCD royalty

Sam Kiildsen runs the rule over Philips' premium-priced TV



Philips' 47PFL9664H is one of the top dogs of the Dutch manufacturer's LCD TV range. Strip out the Cinema 21:9 and LED Pro models and it's actually the most highly-specced TV it offers, boasting a plethora of picture enhancing tech alongside Wi-Fi, web and media-streaming DLNA capabilities – not to mention the iconic Ambilight rear lighting system.

Haul the 47in beast out of its box and you'll find it's a solidly built set that's easy on the eye. The narrow frame sports a fetching brushed metal finish and the TV is a slim 50mm in depth – not as achingly skinny as some edge-lit LED models, but very thin all the same – and running down the right-hand side is an array of touch-sensitive controls.

Perhaps as a result of this slimline profile, there are no connections located on either side panel, and everything is clustered at the back, including five HDMI inputs.

There are also USB and Ethernet ports, the former for playing back media files and the latter for connecting the 47PFL9664H to your home network – although thanks to the built-in Wi-Fi you don't need to use an actual cable. Philips' NetTV feature allows you to view a variety of pre-picked websites (including YouTube), or alternatively log into a full-on web browser – although the sloth-like pace and need to key in URLs via the remote control means it's not the smoothest experience.

The TV's networking talents also allow you to stream media content via DLNA. So if you have a PC or a Mac running some sort of UPnP client, you can plonk yourself down on the sofa and enjoy videos, photos and music stored on your computer.

Would you want to listen to music through your TV's speakers? Well,

the 47PFL9664H comes with a surprisingly good set of them. Despite the TV's thinness, its speakers are capable of belting out a substantial slice of bass, backed up by clear treble.

As for images, the company has brought its full arsenal of enhancement technology to the table here (besides the LED backlighting): Perfect Pixel HD Engine for boosting sharpness and detail while reducing noise; Perfect Natural Motion to remove judder from pictures; and 200Hz Clear LCD to counter motion blur, keeping moving images looking sharp.

It all works together, along with the strong dynamic contrast, to serve up a mightily impressive picture. Black levels are strong, but not at the expense of vibrancy and brightness. Colours are beautifully vivid, with smooth, contour-free gradation from light to dark. There's a huge amount of detail on show, too, particularly with HD sources, and there's built-in sharpness enhancement if you want to upscale SD material.

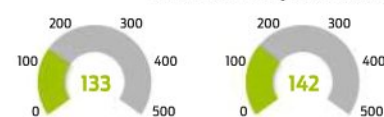
Motion is smooth and moving images remain clear (even for fast-paced games), although the effect 200Hz tech creates might not appeal to all viewers – it can make things look too smooth, and introduce an occasional shimmer around a moving object. You can tone down the processing, or turn it off completely, should you wish.

Top notch, top price

The 47PFL9664H's excellent picture performance, fine array of features and stylish, high-end design make it a very impressive LCD TV. Its price tag will put a lot of people off, but if you're looking for a top-notch largescreen and have the money, then add this one to your list ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
A quite low figure for a CCFL-backlit LCD – maybe LED screens aren't so much greener after all...

Test footage:
A definite measured increase in consumption with movie footage and full volume

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Vivid mode delivers impressive contrast of 34,581:1. Standard mode a more realistic 852:1, with luminance of 41.86ft

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
A typically eccentric selection of presets from Philips, but Warm is acceptably accurate for those who don't want to fiddle with the RGB level and offset parameters in Custom mode
Normal: 10,019K
Medium: 6,779K
Cool: 11,403K

HCC VERDICT

Philips 47PFL9664H
£1,800 Approx

Highs: Excellent picture and sound quality; network features; stylish and slim

Lows: Lofty price tag; sluggish NetTV; no side connections

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Blu-ray refined

Panasonic has added new AV and networking features to its top-of-the-range BD-spinner. **Danny Philips** applauds the result

Panasonic is a superstar of the Blu-ray world. Year after year, its new players are greeted with the sort of unbridled enthusiasm usually reserved for Tom Cruise's red carpet walkabouts in Leicester Square.

The reason for its techno-celebrity is simple: innovation. Profile 1.1, BD-Live, Blu-ray recording – you name it, Panasonic did it first, and over the years no-one has done more to push the format forward.

However, Panasonic's position has been under threat from decks like LG's brilliant BD390, which offers built-in Wi-Fi, PC streaming, unrivalled digital media support and top-drawer performance at a consumer-friendly price. Finding itself at the start of 2010 in the rare position of playing catch-up,

Panasonic has hit back with the DMP-BD85. Equipped with a killer spec and more of the picture processing goodness that made its predecessors so successful, the BD85 might just be Panasonic's masterpiece – at least until it unleashes the 3D-capable DMP-BDT300 later this year...

Simple design

On the outside, the BD85 is an unremarkable sight. Touch sensitive keys, curves or a gloss black finish? A Panasonic buyer craves not these things, apparently. A blue light is the best you can hope for, but at least build quality is solid.

The outlook is much brighter on the back. Multichannel analogue outputs offer receiver luddites a

AV/CV

Product:
Wi-Fi equipped
Profile 2.0
Blu-ray player

Positioning:
The best
specified of
three new decks

Peers:
LG BD390;
Sony
BDP-S760;
Philips
BDP7500

chance to enjoy hi-res Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks, and there's an Ethernet port for accessing BD-Live content, which is finally becoming worth bothering with. There's also a USB input for attaching the BD85's supplied USB dongle – **because one of the BD85's big new features is Wi-Fi support**, bringing the web into your living room without Ethernet cables cluttering up the place.

Plugged into the back, the chunky dongle is unwieldy and could cause problems in your AV rack, but there's an extension lead if you're worried about that sort of thing.

Wireless connectivity throws up more goodies. The BD85 is DLNA certified and as a result you can pull



music and photos from PCs on your home network, and the setup process is slick and hassle-free.

DivX HD playback has been added, too, popping up on the spec sheet alongside MP3 and JPEG. You can play these from USB sticks via the port on the front, which sits next to an SD card slot that accepts higher-capacity SDHC and SDXC cards. But because the BD85 doesn't come with BD Live memory built-in, you'll need to keep a card in the slot for any online activity.

Once running, the deck keeps things simple onscreen, and apart from some unnecessary submenus, it makes navigation a breeze. But there's a sluggishness about the BD85 that you really shouldn't have to put up with these days. Entering the setup menu not only lost my place in the movie, but I also had to wait for the player to handshake with my receiver and TV again.

Beating heart

Once again, Panasonic's P4HD chipset is the beating heart of the BD85 and, in conjunction with PHL Reference Chroma Processor Plus, it delivers beautiful images. With *Inglourious Basterds* the opening shots of the verdant French countryside are conveyed with such depth and richness that you can almost smell the grass, and after

Colonel Landa has charmed his way into the house, the fantastic contrast range sheds light on the painstaking detail of the rickety interior.

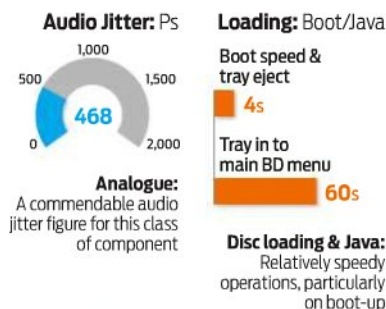
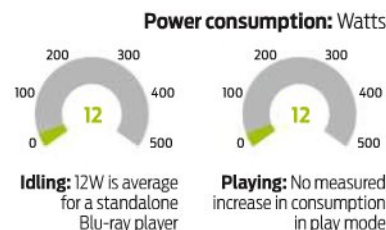
Elsewhere, the BD85 doesn't put a foot wrong – skin tones are faithful, strong hues blaze from the screen and the chaos of the cinema-set showdown is smoothly tracked. And the way it aces the Silicon Optix HQV tests without so much as a flicker or twitch is bordering on nonchalance.

On the audio side, there's a wealth of sound modes to play with, including Digital Tube Sound Simulator, which ups the warmth to make music sound like it's being played on a tube amplifier. The effect is pleasant, but I preferred the stereo untampered. There's more new tech in the shape of an HDMI Jitter Purifier, which enhances the stability of bass performance when piping audio over the digital connection.

Let the deck rip with a movie through the analogue outs and the results are equally electrifying – *Basterds'* brutal denouement is sharp, feisty and oozing with energy from every speaker.

All of which makes the DMP-BD85 a certified triumph. Okay, so it's not the prettiest deck ever designed, nor the fastest, but there's something still very special about this player, particularly when it comes to picture and sound performance •

→ Tech Labs



→ Specifications

Upscaling: *yes* All resolutions up to 1080p

Multiregion: *no* Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD

HDMI: *yes* Version 1.3

Component: *yes* 1 output

Multichannel analogue: *yes* 7.1 phono outputs

Digital audio: *yes* Optical and coaxial outputs

SACD/DVD-A: *no/no* Neither supported

Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: *yes/yes* True HD and DTS-HD MA via HDMI

Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *yes/yes* Profile 2.0: *yes* BD-Live via SD slot; supports Wi-Fi using USB dongle

Dimensions: 430(w) x 55(h) x 249(d)mm

Weight: 2.6kg

Also featuring: SD card slot; DLNA certified; Ethernet port; Viera Cast; DivX HD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, AVCHD playback; P4HD; PHL Reference Chroma Processor Plus; 2x USBs; High Precision 4:4:4 colour processing; Deep Colour; HDMI Jitter Purifier, Digital Tube Sound; dialogue enhancer; Viera Link; playback information window



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMP-BD85
£300 Approx

Highs: Wi-Fi support and networking; overall picture and sound performance

Lows: Sluggish in places; Wi-Fi not built in; picture & music streaming only

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

A ripping good server

Steve May's new best friend is Imerge's elegant XiVA musicm8

XiVA's musicm8 is the easiest entertainment server I've ever installed. To get it up and running took minutes at most. Juiced up and connected to my network via Ethernet, and I was good to go. Having wrestled with servers in the past that literally drove me to distraction with their belligerent non-compliance, this was a relief.

For the uninitiated, the cutely-monikered musicm8 ('music mate') is a music server and ripper, a contemporary update on the hardware that first brought maker Imerge to prominence in the '90s. **It sits on your network, but is conceived as a living room product.** It's neatly turned out, stands vertically or horizontally and has a CD tray to rip discs directly. Significantly, it's very quiet when running.

Fully uPnP-compliant, it can stream its music content to a host of compatible devices. Imerge promotes it as a partner for Sonos, Logitech Squeezebox and Linn DS users. I don't have any of that kit (far too posh), but found it immediately recognized by my PS3, Xbox 360, WDTV and Popcorn Hour devices.

Take stock of your tunes

The unit comes with 1TB of storage, enough for thousands of CDs, and rips without any need to power up a PC. You simply determine the file format it rips to: uncompressed WAV, FLAC or MP3, leaving you to choose a compression level for your usage needs.

The CD ripping process takes a few minutes, and then all the tagging is done automatically, with sleeve art pulled from FreeDB and SOAP web services. All of my rips sounded great, and play-out is stutter- and artefact-free. You may choose to store both high-res and compressed versions of your tunes, to service both portable devices and the needs of a decent home system.

The folder structure on the musicm8 invites both photo and video storage as well. Dump your video downloads into the appropriate folder and you can stream that



AV/CV

Product: Media server and CD ripper combined in one single box

Position: Imerge's only dedicated music server

Peers: Popcorn Hour C-200; RipNAS ripper/storage

content to other networked devices. You can also play tracks from your music collection while browsing photos. Naturally you can manually create your own additional shares for other content.

Although it's not possible to install a second drive into the case you can still build some redundancy protection into your musicm8 system by adding an external USB drive. This gives you the option of RAID 1 mirrored protection.

Overall, the musicm8 is a delight to use. Painless to setup and widely compatible, it's unlikely even the newest of network users will experience any trouble with it. If I was compiling an additional feature wishlist, it might include things like an integrated BitTorrent client, but that's just a nitpick.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: Just switched on, the XiVA musicm8 uses a very low level of power

In use: More than a typical Blu-ray/DVD player, but that's to be expected

→ Specifications

Storage: YES 1TB

DLNA compliant: YES

Connectivity: Ethernet; 4 x USB; multichannel mini jack outputs; front-mounted SD card slot

Dimensions: 300(h) x 65(w) x 260(d)mm

Weight: 1.3kg

Features: FLAC and MP3 options with configurable bitrate; automated recording; web browser configuration; shared folders for video, audio and photos; sleeve art

Stand and deliver: Like an Xbox 360, the musicm8 can be stood on its end or laid on its side

HCC VERDICT

XiVA musicm8
£800 Approx

Highs: Effortless setup; high-quality ripping; whisper quiet

Lows: Single capacity configuration; no BitTorrent client

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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White lightning

The Full HD EH-TW4400 is part of Epson's latest onslaught on the home cinema market. **Martin Pipe** assesses its chances

Epson knows a thing or two about projector technology. Late last year, it announced a 4,096 x 2,160-pixel LCD microdisplay for a new breed of super high-definition 4K2K PJs. Until that nine megapixel future beckons, though, we'll have to make do with the Full HD displays that are delivered by the likes of its new flagship EH-TW5500 and (reviewed here), step-down EH-TW4400 models.

At the core of the EH-TW4400 are three of Epson's C2Fine LCD panels – one each for the red, green and blue contributions to the picture. You also get the latest incarnation of Epson's proprietary 'Cinema Filter' technology, which filters the light of the colour passed or blocked by each of the three panels, so that stray wavelengths are kept at bay.

Between all this clever visual technology and your screen lies a

Fujinon 2.1x zoom-lens with a living-room-friendly throw-ratio. Thumbwheels into the top of the PJ facilitate lens-shift in both vertical and horizontal axes, although I found these a little rough and imprecise. Zoom and focus are also manual adjustments – there's no remote-controlled motorised luxury here.

That's not to say adjustments are limited; the 4400's neat menus provide plenty of these, including



The Epson's Fujinon lens can throw a 30-300in image

AV/CV

Product:
Midrange Full
HD LCD
projector

Positioning:
One rung down
from the
range-topping
TW5500

Peers:
JVC HD350;
Panasonic
PT-AE4000;
Sony VPL-HW15

colour temperature, gamma curves and the speed of the auto-iris system. You don't get the ISF calibration options of the TW5500.

Performance

Using the default 'theatre' setting, the picture was initially something of a disappointment. Yes, complex material like crowd scenes served up a feast of true-to-life colour, with judder-free movement and engrossing foreground detail all the way from the centre of the screen to its edges. However, I couldn't help noticing that at extremes of content brightness, whites were clearly crushed – any picture information in these areas was thus obliterated.

That said, choosing the low-power mode tamed the plentiful brightness the optical engine can project – and in doing so improved darker content.

Calibration transformed the performance aspects that were found lacking; in particular the dynamic range now

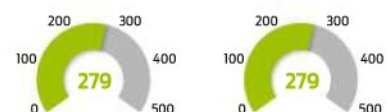
comfortably accommodated a variety of sources without struggling at the extremes. Black level was a definite beneficiary here – my recommendation is to combine calibration with the low-power mode and a grey screen (ie gain of less than 1) in home cinema rooms, especially for modest picture sizes measuring less than 10 feet diagonally. You'll also get a dramatic reduction in fan noise, too. However, even after calibration, I was still disappointed by shadow detailing.

Conclusion

It's clear to see that the TW4400 is a well-designed LCD PJ built around the needs of home cinema enthusiasts. Features and connectivity can't be faulted, and a few years ago images of this colour fidelity would have been exclusive to expensive three-chip DLP projectors. It's up against stiff competition at this price point, though, and may struggle to stand out from the crowd.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
In Natural mode, the
4400 used 279W.
Eco mode cuts
consumption by 50W

Powered: Cinema
Black mode reduces
consumption to around
223W; otherwise,
there's no change in
power use with movie
playback

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Measured at
almost 20,000:1 in
Dynamic mode, more
like 7,000:1 in Standard
mode; luminance is a
decent 46,897fl

Colour accuracy



Presets: A wide range
of useful presets plus
full RGBCMY hue,
saturation and
brightness options
1 Dynamic: 6,490K
2 Living Room: 7,326K
3 Natural: 5,741K
4 Theatre: 6,345K
6 x.v.color: 5,706K

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES up to 1080p24
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES 2 x HDMI v1.3
PC input: YES 1 D-Sub 15-pin
12V trigger: YES one output
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI
lumens (claimed)
Contrast (claimed): 130,000:1
(claimed)
Dimensions: 450(w) x 136(h)
x360(d)mm
Weight: 7.5kg
Also features: 3x 0.74in C2Fine D7
LCD panels; test pattern
generator; low-power lamp mode;
2.1x zoom lens with manual
horizontal/vertical lens shift; 10bit
video processing with PixelWorks
DNX scaler; backlit remote;
overscan; flexible adjustment
memories; iris control (off/
normal/high-speed); digital noise
reduction; seven colour-mode
presets; comprehensive scaler/
gamma/colour adjustments;
RS232 serial port; 22dB quoted
fan noise; 4,000-hour lamp life



HCC VERDICT

Epson EH-TW4400
£3,000 Approx

Highs: Colour fidelity; flexibility; crisp
foreground detail; very quiet
operating noise

Lows: Careful setup required for best
results; disappointing shadow detail

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Supreme among servers

Chris Jenkins struggles to find anything bad to say about WDTV Live

Western Digital's original WDTV set the standard for media servers. It was basically a dock which connected to your TV and acted as an interface for digital media files from connected USB devices, such as pocket hard drives or USB memory sticks. It worked so well because it was simple to use, handled practically every digital file format imaginable (including hi-def MKVs), and it didn't feature a proprietary slot designed to bully you into buying a WD hard drive.

Now WDTV has been updated. The new WDTV

Tiny tot: It may be small and dinky, but there's a whole lot of magic going on under the hood

Live is similar to the original iteration, but also has some slick updates, the most significant of which is networking capability.

Physically, it's similar to the original, a cigar-box-sized lightweight plastic case with an external power supply and remote control. However, the finish is now steel grey instead of black. On one side is a USB port, on the back is the power connector, USB, HDMI v1.3, optical digital audio, LAN, AV out and component video outputs (for which adaptor cables are provided).

Highs

- Plug in and power up, and you'll find that the icon-based menu system, slightly reminiscent of Sony's Xross style, is slicker than the

original, though it is still organised into categories such as video, music and images.

- The file system has been updated to include video preview thumbnails and support for DTS files.
- The new network capability turns the WDTV Live into a DLNA-compatible media device. The network support includes limited internet access, which at the time of review was restricted to YouTube, Flickr and a few other sites, but I suspect that situation will change.

Lows

- Some may prefer a media server with its own built-in hard drive.



HCC VERDICT

WDTV Live
£120 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

SONOS S5 → £350 Approx → www.sonos.co.uk

Sonos so far

Rik Henderson extols the benefits of music-streaming

We've encountered very few home cinema installs that don't have some sort of music-streaming system as part of their make-up. And often, that system tends to be made by Sonos, such is the quality and reputation of its gear.

The company has now added a simple, one-box music player to the line-up and it fits in superbly, now allowing the system to reach even the smallest of rooms.

Highs

- Superb sound quality for a one-box solution – with more than enough volume to fill a decently-sized room.
- The five drivers provide a rounded sound experience, with the bass response being especially accurate.
- Streaming files stored remotely through the S5 is an easy experience, and, as it is PC-based, it is compatible

with the expansive world of internet radio, for free. In addition, if you invest in a Napster account, you can stream just about any song you can think of, anytime you like, without needing to own the CD.

- The simple, clean design matches its stablemates, and it looks and feels expensive and worthy.
- Operation can be controlled via an iPhone or iPod Touch loaded with a free, downloadable Sonos app.

Lows

- There's no iPod dock, so everything needs to be streamed from a separate source.
- If you want to use the box wirelessly (who has an Ethernet connection in the kitchen, for



Boom box: The five enclosed drivers include a 3.5in subwoofer

example?) you need to buy a separate ZoneBridge or ZonePlayer, costing an extra £80 at least.

- If you don't have an iPhone or iPod Touch, you will need to buy a dedicated remote for £280, unless you're happy with controlling the box solely through a desktop or laptop computer.

HCC VERDICT

Sonos S5
£350 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

In Brief

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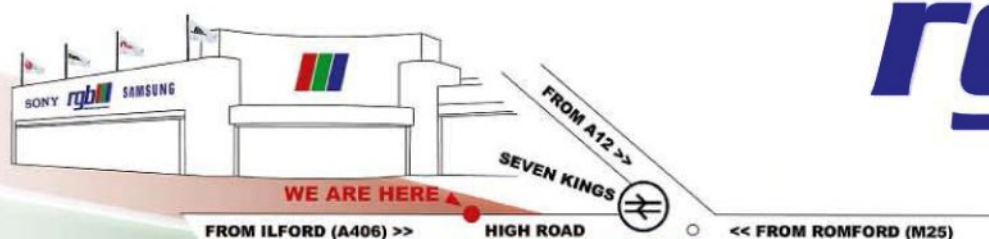
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A neat box of tricks

Chris Jenkins finds yet another solution for his multimedia problems

We've seen media streamers from a range of storage and networking specialists, but Verbatim's MediaStation isn't just an exercise in bandwagon-jumping. Combining a multimedia player and recorder with a DVB-T/analogue hybrid TV tuner, built-in NTFS-formatted SATA hard drive and wireless networking with a good balance of format support and connectivity, it seems to justify itself pretty well.

Socketry includes an SD/MS card slot, USB and USB Host, component video out, an HDMI 1080i out, LAN, coaxial, optical and RF. A remote control, a bundle of cables and a software disc including Nero MOVE IT software are provided, and the package we reviewed included the optional wireless USB dongle.

An onscreen display offers five main options; TV In, File copy, Setup, Browser and Timer. Features include recording, storage and playback of TV

broadcasts; upscaling to HD during playback; one-touch and scheduled recording using an EPG; time-shift recording; image photo back up from the memory card slot; media playback from the card slots or USB; H.264 playback from PC via the provided Transcode Server software; and streaming media playback via Ethernet and wireless LAN.

Highs

- Well-constructed and with a practical remote control, the MediaStation combines some of the best features of the WDTV and Popcorn Hour devices.
- Supports MP3, WMA, WAV7/8, OGG, AAC, JPEG and BMP; and MPEG-1/2/4, DivX 3/4/5/6 and MP4 AVC (H.264) via the supplied Transcode Server PC software.
- There's a choice of 500GB and 1TB hard-drive sizes and packages with or without the wireless dongle.



Lows

- Supports 1080i output but not 1080p; many video formats are only supported if streamed from a PC via the Transcode Server software added by an update.
- The GUI graphics are primitive.

Meaty media machine: The build quality of the Verbatim is impressive

HCC VERDICT

Verbatim MediaStation HD DVR
£230 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

BOSE SOUNDLINK → FROM £490 Approx → www.bose.co.uk

American muscle czar

Rik Henderson is impressed by Bose's beefiness

It's been a big month for one-box music streamers, with the Sonos S5 reviewed on page 76, but Bose's SoundLink offering is content to keep things simple.

Rather than connect to the internet, this wireless unit pairs with an included dongle/transmitter. That USB key then plugs into a separate PC or Apple Mac and syncs with iTunes in order to stream your entire music collection. It doesn't

even need a home network to operate, so it is ideal for those who shudder at NAS boxes and the like.

Highs

- Boy, if you're a fan of bass, the SoundLink won't let you down. Its adoption of the company's proprietary Waveguide technology allows for very accurate low-frequency response.
- The unit has a rechargeable battery, allowing you to carry it from room to room without having to plug it in each time.
- The wireless dongle and receiver in the SoundLink can still communicate up to 60 feet away from each other. They also use a Wi-Fi tech that doesn't conflict with a conventional internet protocol.

- A rear-mounted auxiliary input allows you to connect a separate audio source via a mini-jack.
- Works with some online music-streaming services (such as Spotify) as long as you have them set-up on your laptop or desktop computer.

Lows

- Its reliance on iTunes restricts the SoundLink's file type compatibility to an extent, and may put off Windows Media Player devotees.
- Neither the unit nor the supplied remote have a screen, so it is hard to choose what you want to play from a computer if you haven't already set up playlists.

HCC VERDICT

Bose SoundLink
£490 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



In Brief

Horror Zone
I.B. Tauris
£15 approx



Subtitled 'The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema', this collection of 15 essays about the genre is for those who take their scary movies very seriously. While there's a degree of pomposity and navel-gazing, on the whole it provides a fascinating alternative approach to these films and their gore-crazed fans.

1 2 3 4 5

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"Plenty of warmth and emotion",
Overall: 9/10



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Teufel

Totally Klipsch

Adam Rayner auditions a set of sleek-looking compact speakers with special powers

American speaker manufacturer Klipsch is famed for its horn speakers, due to their clarity, power, definition and, most of all, sheer size. Its legend-model, the Klipschorn, is like a triangular sideboard, but this 5.1 set of Icon speakers is more living room-friendly, and intended to marry up to modern flatscreen TVs, so adopts a kind of horns-lite approach.

Available in two pretty but subtle veneer finishes, each of these medium-sized boxes features a cleverly-designed polymer assembly in its face that squirts the high-frequency audio all around with a greater efficiency than any normal dome tweeter ever could. Think of them as speakers for those who want sexy, top-end performance without their room dominated by massive boxes. Which is quite a lot of us, probably.

Heroic horns

I love some bits of technology more than others. I worship the simplicity of my dishwasher and what it does so reliably, and I hate my Thomson PVR with a passion. It has so often corrupted files of programmes I enjoyed, I now fear never seeing a series all the way through. I was therefore thrilled to get Season Two of *Heroes* on Blu-ray for Christmas, as I lost it part way through during its terrestrial broadcast.

Of course, it is so much better on BD, with the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack. Bullets fly and stop, glass shatters and men streak by with a whoosh. At least they do with the Icon system.

Klipsch is speaker-biz aristocracy, masters of the dark art of the compression-driven horn. Simply put, these have megaphones of purity in front of the specially-designed tweeters. Not familiar domes but compression-driven diaphragms that

work on the same sound-squeezed-and-directed principle as the professional speakers used by studio and live sound engineers.

As this technology relies on the rules of physics, pertaining to the wavelengths of the sound being made, bass horns are often big enough for a small family to hide inside for weeks. What's more, tweety compression driver horns are absurdly efficient and spread the sound out like warm butter.

It means that for very few watts, these speakers, like all of their brethren, are improbably loud. In turn, this means your amp works less hard, leaving it more bass-end headroom.

8in wonder woofer

Horn speakers rock but can often be let down by weedy subwoofers. Thankfully, the woofer that came with this set, despite being the mere 8in driver version (there's a 10in, too), absolutely stonks. The XW-300D has an insane amount of cone travel. It's a sealed box, too, so can go as low as the wobbliness of the woofer allows, rather than resonating mostly at a port-tuned frequency. It was deep, throbby, tight and melodic, and beautifully controlled by a decent amp. Klipsch has bought into licensed BASH technology, a kind of digital hybrid bass amplification (all about the power supply switching inside) that offers more grip for the watts. It worked a treat with *Heroes*, as the sound mixers are always giving it some *basso profundo* to impress the viewer.

These Icon speakers are beautifully put together, using Allen-headed bolts to their rears around the ports – rounded-end, ovoid slots which allow a large amount of carefully-tuned air to puff in and out. These afford some real power output to the small glassfibre based cones that look like they

AV/CV

Product:
A 5.1 array of Klipsch quality and dispersion but in a size meant to complement modern TV sets

Position:
Relatively entry-level for a Klipsch system

Peers:
B&W CM7;
Jamo
A707PDD 5.1;
Dali Ikon 6 5.1







shouldn't be able to do what they do. Also, in the case of the bigger boxes, you get a set of well-made steel spikes to anchor them to the deck. There are rubber pads for the centre and surrounds, with the latter also getting two 'P' holes on the rear for wall-hanging.

Apart from the subwoofer, they all use magnetic attraction to hold their grilles in place with Neodymium discs embedded within the grilles and the cabinets. They stay in place well and the cabinets look far better without any ugly fixing holes. The finish is superb but understated, and I gather takes several layers of sanded lacquer to make them look so svelte. Even the outrigger bits at the base of the towers look good. Put simply, the finish of this Klipsch set is gorgeous.

The woofer is high-tech but a doddle to setup. It has a panel control on the top to access all the stuff you need to do (volume, EQ, lowpass and phase) via up/down and left/right buttons, an 'enter' button and a backlit LCD character display. It has a sophisticated set of abilities, and you can save your own settings under 'Movie', 'Music' and 'Night' labels. There's even a 60Hz 'music' EQ setting and a 30Hz centred 'depth' EQ as well.

More than a feeling

I am an admitted lover of audio you can feel, but I do enjoy accuracy above all else. I'll forgive a small scale if it's simply related to price, like

Tech in a box:
The XW-300D woofer features a variety of setup options

cars and top speed. And this system is like a Toyota Prius, sucking absurd amounts of go from each and every bit of fuel.

That efficiency is a big part of the Klipsch story and the Icons especially. I had some fun with *Heroes'* DTS-HD soundtrack, as it's amazingly crafted. I watched several discs' worth – and quite a lot at night – and found that while it couldn't begin to do the majestic might and scale of a high-end all-floorstander system and weapons'-grade sub, **it was brilliant at audio placement and bizarrely good at low volumes.**

Those toy-like horns actually deserve the deepest respect for sheer weasel-like cunning. Wherever you sit, you will be within the magical 80-80° spread these horns achieve, and that means that the energy in the detail-carrying high frequencies will always reach you in the right amounts, so you get the 'director-intended' mix. I enjoyed them hugely, even if they were a bit less in-your-face than my taste.

Anyway, that's my taste. For normal people with rooms up to a decent size, this set is a high-quality option at a tempting price – including a five-year warranty and free shipping when ordered from Klipsch's website. It also specs a bigger array of Icons with more potent fronts and a larger woofer if you want. And if you need to fill a real cinema, it makes plenty of speakers that size, too...●

→ Specifications

WF-34 floorstanders

Drive Units: 3x 4.5in fibreglass cone woofers and 1x patented XT-Tractrix 4.5in-long HF horn with 1in titanium compression driver
Enclosure: Two-way ported
Frequency Response: 50Hz-23kHz
Sensitivity: 95.5dB
Power Handling: 125W
Dimensions: 165(w) x 1016(h) x 241(d)mm
Weight: 15kg

WC-24 centre

Drive Units: 2x 4.5in fibreglass cone woofers and 1x patented XT-Tractrix 4.5in-long HF horn with 1in titanium compression driver
Enclosure: Two-way ported
Frequency Response: 85Hz-23kHz
Sensitivity: 94.5dB
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 457(w) x 165(h) x 165(d)mm
Weight: 5kg

WS-24 surrounds

Drive Units: 2x 4.5in fibreglass cone woofers and 2x patented XT-Tractrix 3.75in-long HF horn with 1in titanium compression driver
Enclosure: Two-way ported
Frequency Response: 82Hz-23kHz
Sensitivity: 91dB
Power Handling: 75W
Dimensions: 324(w) x 114(h) x 178(d)mm
Weight: 5.9kg

XW-300D subwoofer

Drive Units: 1x 8in ultra-high excursion fibreglass cone
Enclosure: Sealed
Frequency Response: 22Hz-120Hz +/-3dB
On board power: 300W RMS BASH Digital Hybrid with DCS (Digital Control System)
Dimensions: 254(w) x 279(h) x 362(d)mm
Weight: 10.9kg
Connections: Phono input in stereo



HCC VERDICT

Klipsch Icon 5.1
£2,700 Approx

Highs: Possessed of an effortless clarity and detail; superb, small woofer; value for money

Lows: Not suited to largescale cinema rooms

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

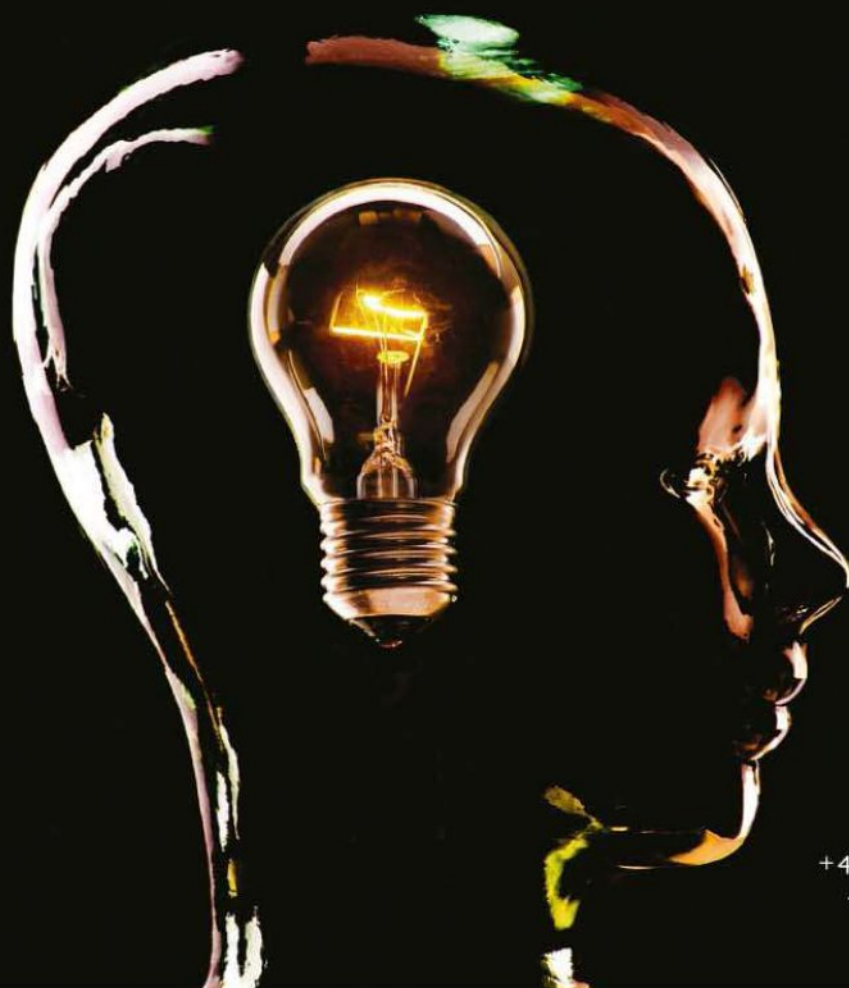
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UK's Most Wanted TVs

John Archer tests the four big-brand mid-size screens that are at the top of consumers' shopping lists



THE CONTENDERS

PANASONIC TX-P42G15

£850 Approx
42in NeoPDP plasma with built-in Freesat HD tuner

SAMSUNG LE40B650

£700 Approx
40in LCD with access to the Media 2.0 online portal

THE TEST

The four TVs in this group test – the most searched-for screens on UK price comparison sites – were tested by HCC in both a domestic environment and in our high-tech laboratory.

In the living room environment, our findings were obtained using equally low levels of ambient light

for each TV, with picture settings calibrated using the *HD Video Essentials* Blu-ray – chosen because it's available for anyone to buy.

Each TV was tested in the 'living room' phase using exactly the same sequences from the same Blu-rays and DVDs, most notably the HD platter of Tim Burton's beautifully gruesome, and testing, *Sweeney Todd*.

We also used pre-recorded broadcasts from a Sky+ box to evaluate standard-def performance, as well as terrestrial footage from the TVs' tuners.

In the laboratory part of our tests, we used industry-respected measuring and metering equipment to arrive at some objective numbers to put alongside the subjective results.



SONY KDL-40W5500

£800 Approx

Mid-range Bravia LCD in a 40in iteration

TOSHIBA 37RV635

£550 Approx

Affordable 37in LCD TV with Resolution+ technology

In a year where the world at large has been going through the slump of all slumps, TVs like the four models featured today – those that capture the interest of the buying public ahead of their peers – can feel justly proud of themselves.

Something about them – price, features, design, performance or, hopefully, a combination of these factors – has led to them becoming the top searched-for TVs on the UK's most popular internet sites. So we thought we'd better find out exactly what it is about them that's making a cash-strapped public tick.

The picture desk

Picture quality is still king when it comes to buying a TV. And in this grouptest it's the area that's the most hard fought over.

Kicking off with black levels, it's no surprise – given plasma's traditional advantage in this respect – to find Panasonic's P42G15 making a good show of itself. During the dark, gut-churning shots in *Sweeney Todd's*

cellar, the P42G15 is free from the grey mist that often blights low-contrast screens, giving dark images punch and plenty of shadow detail.

Yet the Panasonic's black levels are run close by two of the LCD contenders. Samsung's 40B650, for instance, uses an Ultra Clear panel design, with a polarising filter for soaking up ambient light, to help deliver one of the deepest blacks I've witnessed on a non-LED-lit LCD TV, despite our Tech Labs' measurement of an average real world contrast of around 6,000:1.

Crucially, the Samsung even delivers a good black level without its dynamic contrast system engaged, so you don't have to suffer with jumping brightness levels to make a dark scene enjoyable.

The Sony 40W5500, meanwhile, comes mighty close to matching the Samsung, and delivered an excellent contrast measurement of over 115,000:1. It falls short on account of some subtle – really subtle – backlight inconsistencies.

The weakest TV in the black level department is Toshiba's 37RV635, which displays clearly more greyness over Todd's flesh-filled basement than the others. There's less subtle detail visible in dark areas too, since in order to get a really workable black level, the 37RV635 has to sacrifice a hefty dollop of brightness.

On the upside, while the 37RV635 might struggle versus its more expensive rivals here, it still ranks as a pretty impressive black level performer for its money.

The 37RV635 is also the weakest screen here when it comes to brightness, making it not the best choice for bright rooms – unless you're happy to live without much black level. Selecting the 37RV635's Dynamic preset makes its pictures look far more aggressive – if also far less likeable.

Plasma pictures often struggle for brightness versus the best LCD models, but the Panasonic P42G15 doesn't fare too badly – a function, no doubt, of its NeoPDP panel

PANASONIC VIERA TX-P42G15 → £850 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk



In brief

Despite not looking particularly glamorous, the P42G15 rests in the upper half of Panasonic's current plasma range of screens. This means that it's the proud owner of one of the company's NeoPDP panels, which offer greater brightness and running efficiency.

It also reflects Panasonic's commitment to the Freesat cause,

boasting a built-in Freesat HD tuner as well as the usual analogue and Freeview tuners.

The P42G15 is also one of only a handful of 42in plasma TVs with a Full HD resolution; has multimedia support from an SD card slot; a LAN port that is able to access Panasonic's online VieraCast service; and boasts what Panasonic likes to call 600Hz processing.

Pack it in: The P42G15's screen holds 1,920 x 1,080 pixels – an achievement that so far only Panasonic has managed on a 42in plasma

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
Very high power consumption, but Eco mode can cut it by around 100W in dim lighting

Test footage:
This figure is more typical of normal consumption as our full white 100IRE signal demands more of the backlighting system

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Though it falls short of the claimed 2m:1, the measured contrast ratio in Dynamic mode is excellent, though luminance is not high, at 27.37fL

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
The Normal setting provides a decent colour temperature, but there are no manual adjustments available.
Normal: 6,758K
Warm: 5,875K
Cool: 8,066K

design. Rare bright scenes in *Sweeney Todd*, like the film's richly-saturated fantasy sequences, don't look as brilliant and luminous as they do on the Samsung and Sony contenders, though. In fact, both the Samsung and Sony TVs are capable of looking blisteringly intense and vivid during bright scenes.

The sheer luminosity of the Sony and Samsung's pictures helps them produce colour palettes of impressive richness. The Samsung has the edge

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: The Samsung's sound is feeble, but it wins this crucial section thanks to its bright, crisp, and consistent pictures. Panasonic's HD performance is awesome, meanwhile, but its standard-def isn't. Sony's 40incher suffers from viewing angle and backlight issues, while the Toshiba is good for its money, but can't compete with its better-specced rivals

Panasonic TX-P42G15: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung LE-40B650: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony KDL-40W5500: 1 2 3 4 5

Toshiba 37RV635: 1 2 3 4 5

when it comes to sheer drama when showing, say, Todd's reminiscence before his life went down the toilet – especially with its wide colour gamut mode engaged. The Sony, though, is a fraction subtler, with the Bravia Engine 3 system excelling with marginal tonal shifts and blends.

Panasonic's P42G15 initially looks off the pace where colours are concerned, with hues lacking 'oomph' and a few rogue tones crop up during standard-definition playback. However, the longer you live with the TV, the more you'll realise that its colour tones with HD are surprisingly natural and at times almost delicate in their accuracy and finesse. The often washed-out *Sweeney Todd* colour palette is one of the trickiest around for a flat TV to handle, yet while the Samsung and Sony models did very well, the Panasonic ran through the entire Blu-ray without ever making me feel conscious of a colour that didn't look quite right.

Once again, Toshiba's 37RV635 falls a little short with colour. There's

a decent vibrancy to proceedings if you go with one of the set's more brightness-emphasising picture presets, but with the TV calibrated to a more sensible situation, dark hues can look a little out of kilter with the rest of the colour palette. Colours also seem muted.

The sharper the better

When it comes to showing relatively static HD sources, there really isn't much difference in picture sharpness between the four screens, with even the bargain-priced Toshiba holding its own. Past experience had me expecting a slightly softer tone from the Panasonic plasma, but the P42G15 does very nicely. If the LCD pictures look sharper, it's because they're brighter and thus tend to emphasise edges.

More differences arise when things start moving, though. Panasonic's plasma technology hands it an immediate advantage, as its pictures suffer really no discernible motion blur at all. There's a tiny bit of

SAMSUNG LE40B650 → £700 Approx → www.samsung.co.uk



In brief

The 40B650 belongs to the top tier of Samsung's non-LED TV range (aside from a single 40in B750 model with 200Hz), so it's not surprising, given Samsung's current high-flying reputation, to find it combining gorgeous looks with a large feature count.

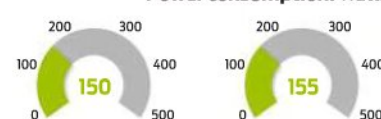
Among those features are 100Hz processing and an unprecedented

array of multimedia functionality, including access to Samsung's online Yahoo Widgets-driven Media 2.0 service, streaming from a DLNA PC, playback of a wide variety of file formats via USB, Wi-Fi connection via an optional USB dongle, and even a hefty chunk of built-in multimedia applications, including recipes and games.

Sleek: Samsung's seamless 'Crystal' design continues to give the Korean brand an aesthetic edge over its Japanese rivals

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
A reasonable white 100IRE measurement for a 40in screen. Dynamic mode increases consumption to 211W

Test footage:
There's only a slight increase in consumption with movie footage and audio

Contrast: ratio



Picture: A modest 3,086:1 in Standard mode and a slightly more impressive 6,049:1 in Dynamic mode is hardly 'ultra contrast'. Luminance in Standard mode is a reasonable 74.66fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
A fair selection of CT presets (some only available in Movie mode) plus full manual control of R/G/B level and gain for perfect adjustment
Cool: 12,198K
Normal: 9,797K
Warm 1: 7,877K
Warm 2: 6,604K
Warm 3: 5,507K

judder, despite the best efforts of the brand's 600Hz processing, but with the *Sweeney Todd* BD the residual judder is actually quite reminiscent of watching a film at the cinema.

Both the Samsung and Sony TVs suffer minor blurring of motion despite their 100Hz engines – the Sony fractionally more than the Samsung. But the effect of this with both screens is seldom distracting.

The Toshiba exhibits the clearest evidence of resolution-loss during *Sweeney Todd*'s rare bursts of fast action, but it's not a major flaw. And to counter it, the 37RV365 handles standard-definition pictures with aplomb – provided, at least, that you're very careful with the settings of its Resolution+ processing system, leaving it no higher than level two, or possibly three.

Sony's Bravia Engine 3 processing also helps produce a fine standard definition picture, adding sharpness while also suppressing noise, but Samsung's 40B650 isn't quite as good at suppressing noise.

Surprisingly, the weakest screen for me with SD footage is the P42G15, which can look a little soft and, the difference between this set's standard and hi-def pictures is pronounced. However, its viewing angle is the best of the bunch; the P42G15 can be watched almost from right angles before any significant loss of contrast or colour occurs. Of the LCD screens, the Samsung has the widest angle tolerance.

Most HCC readers have some sort of separate audio system, but you don't always want to boot it up when watching standard television. So how do the in-built speakers of four contenders perform?

The weakest is definitely the Samsung 40B650, as its 'invisible' speakers just don't have the raw power or dynamic range to avoid sounding thin, unclear and uninvolved when pushed hard.

The 37RV635 manages more range, especially at the bass end of things, but still lacks the power and openness to meet the challenge of

one of *Sweeney Todd*'s musical climaxes – or explosions in our favourite action flicks.

Panasonic's P42G15 and Sony's 40W5500 both deliver a sense of expansion when a meaty soundtrack demands it, and aren't as prone to harshness as our other two contenders. Neither of these models has sufficient bass to be considered excellent, however.

Design

The clear winner in this section, as you will probably guess just from

DESIGN

Round-up: In style-terms, Samsung continues to lead the way when it comes to TV design, leaving all of our other models looking old-fashioned by comparison. Though the Toshiba deserves a little credit for not looking nearly as cheap as it should

Panasonic TX-P42G15: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung LE-40B650: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony KDL-40W5500: 1 2 3 4 5

Toshiba 37RV635: 1 2 3 4 5

SONY BRAVIA KDL-40W5500 → £800 Approx → www.sony.co.uk



In brief

Aesthetically, Sony's 40W5500 suffers by coming after Samsung's 40B650. But don't let its uninspiring looks fool you – the 40W5500 is pretty well-specified, despite being reasonably affordable by Bravia standards.

It's got 100Hz, for a start, but more important still is its Bravia Engine 3 system – Sony's latest and

comfortably greatest TV video processor to date. It also joins all of our contenders so far in carrying online functionality, in the shape of an Ethernet port able to jack into Sony's AppliCast online service.

This Ethernet port also supports DLNA PC streaming, while a USB port proves able to handle JPEG stills and MP3 files.

Bravia brain:

With its Bravia Engine 3 processor, the W5500 promises top-range picture performance

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
Again, power consumption is around what we would expect for an LCD TV of this size

Test footage:
Very little additional power is consumed with live footage and audio volume turned up to maximum; Eco Mode can save 30W in dim lighting

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Excellent post-calibration contrast ratio, one of the few times when the measured figure has exceeded the specification. Luminance is also fair at 37.89fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
The Neutral default mode is a little hot, the Cool mode far too hot; Warm 2 mode is acceptable, while manual R/G/B adjustment will deliver a perfect 6,500K.
Neutral: 8,773K
Warm 2: 6,341K
Cool: 11,043K

looking at the pictures in this feature, is Samsung's 40B650. Its Crystal one-piece finish and elegant lines leave the others for dead.

The remaining models are much of a muchness, really. Toshiba probably just sneaks second, since although it's a bit plasticky, it's compact and no-nonsense. Toshiba has also had the chutzpah to make its logo luminous, aping one of Sony's old trademarks.

The Sony edges the Panasonic, but still ranks as something of a disappointment.

We've suggested before that Panasonic could do with a total aesthetic refresh for its plasma TVs, and the chunky and unimaginative P42G15 does nothing to change that view.

Features

Considering our four contenders today have merely been selected based on the fact that they're popular with you, the buying public, it's striking how similar their key

features are. As such, they're a real snapshot of the sort of stuff a typical TV buyer wants these days.

In connection terms, three of our models – the Sony 40W5500, Samsung's 40B650 and Toshiba's 37RV635 – carry four HDMI's. The Panasonic only has three, but then it does have a Freesat HD tuner built-in, meaning you probably won't need that extra input.

All four of our models also deliver a degree of multimedia connectivity beyond the D-Sub PC jacks common to all of them. The Samsung, Sony, and Panasonic models tout Ethernet ports to both access each brand's respective online services, or stream files from a DLNA PC. The Panasonic's Ethernet port should also allow access to the BBC's Freesat iPlayer service some time this year.

The more affordable Toshiba doesn't carry an Ethernet port, but does have a USB input for playing JPEG photographs. The USB ports on the Sony and Samsung TVs, add

music and video file playback to proceedings; Panasonic goes for an SD card slot instead, capable of MPEG2/DivX/AVCHD video as well as JPEGs.

The online systems of the Panasonic and Samsung models are both decent, with a reasonable diversity of content and nice front ends. The Sony AppliCast system, by comparison, currently feels as impoverished as *Oliver Twist*. But it's better than nothing, I suppose, which is what you get with the Toshiba.

FEATURES

Round-up: The Panasonic P42G15's Freesat HD tuner and upcoming BBC iPlayer functionality just steal it a march on the otherwise similarly-featured Sony and Samsung TVs. The Resolution+ system on the Toshiba is good, though the set lacks the motion processing and Ethernet functions of the other TVs

Panasonic TX-P42G15: 1 2 3 4 5
Samsung LE-40B650: 1 2 3 4 5
Sony KDL-40W5500: 1 2 3 4 5
Toshiba 37RV635: 1 2 3 4 5

TOSHIBA 37RV635 → £500 Approx → www.toshiba.co.uk



In brief

With a price tag as low as £550, the single most remarkable fact about the 37RV635 is that it isn't actually Toshiba's entry-level model. However, it is Toshiba's cheapest 37in model to boast a Full HD resolution, and it offers a claimed contrast ratio (50,000:1) that's more than double that of Toshiba's entry-level AV635 model.

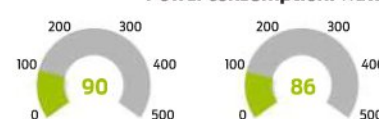
Other notable features, especially for the 37RV635's price, are its Active Vision II video processing, JPEG playback via USB, Toshiba's unusually potent Resolution+ engine that's designed to boost the sharpness of standard-definition pictures, and a surprising amount of setup flexibility – including, even, a degree of colour management and four HDMI inputs.

Super scaler:

Toshiba has culled technology from its Cell Processor to create its Resolution+ system for upscaling standard definition

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
While Standard mode power consumption is good, opting for Dynamic mode adds about 25W

Test footage:
Consumption actually drops with movie play. Using the Auto Brightness Sensor reduces it further

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Our Labs' measurement is nowhere near the claimed figure, and luminance is unremarkable at 59.07fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
Though the 10 numbered presets give a wide range, only preset 3 gets acceptably close to 6,500K. Manual adjustment delivers perfect results
3: 6,390K
5: 7,233K
10: 11,318K

Final standings

In putting these four models in preferential order, I have no choice but to rank the Toshiba in last place. The 37RV635 just doesn't have the features or picture quality to rival the other three models. On the other hand, it's also considerably cheaper, and probably one of the best £500 TVs around.

However, for us at *Home Cinema Choice*, performance and features – in that order – are always king. So the Toshiba reluctantly has to end up fourth.

From here on things get trickier. All three remaining sets have much to commend them, with different weaknesses. The Sony's pictures are sharp, bright and colourful, but suffer a limited viewing angle and some minor backlight inconsistency.

The Samsung looks glorious, has dynamic, crisp pictures, and a stunning feature count. Its only real weakness is its audio.



The Panasonic lacks brightness and dynamism if used in a bright environment, and there are colour and sharpness issues with its standard-definition performance. But it has that Freesat HD tuner, and in a darkened room with an HD movie, it delivers a deliciously cinematic experience.

Considered from a viewpoint of all-round sheer desirability, including value, looks and performance, the final running order I've come up with for our top three looks like this: Sony's 40W5500 in third, Panasonic's P42G15 in second, and Samsung's 40B650 in top spot. Because you've got your own audio system, haven't you? ●



HCC VERDICT

Samsung LE-40B650
£700 Approx

Highs: Good price; gorgeous design; excellent feature count; solid all-round pictures
Lows: Pretty ineffectual audio; not much else...

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 40in LCD
HD Ready: yes including 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: yes Freeview plus CI slot
Component video: yes one input
HDMI: yes four v1.3 HDMI
PC input: yes one VGA input
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): 500cd/m2
Contrast ratio (claimed): 'Ultra', whatever that means
Dimensions: 995.1(w) x 650.4(h) x 78.6(d)mm
Weight: 14.5kg
Other features: DNIe processing; 100Hz processing; USB for JPEG/video/music playback; wide colour gamut option; Content Library; Ethernet for net and DLNA PC connectivity



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P42G15
£850 Approx

Highs: Superb black levels; excellent cinematic HD pictures; wide viewing angle
Lows: SD pictures; boring design; lacks brightness

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 42in plasma
HD Ready: yes including 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: yes Freeview, Freesat HD, plus CI slot
Component video: yes one input
HDMI: yes three v1.3 HDMI
PC input: yes one VGA input
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 2,000,000:1
Dimensions: 1,029(w) x 704(h) x 334(d)mm
Weight: 28kg
Other features: BBC iPlayer compatibility; Intelligent Frame Creation (600Hz); AVCHD/JPEG/DivX playback from SD; VieraCast online functionality; DLNA PC streaming



HCC VERDICT

Sony Bravia KDL-40W5500
£800 Approx

Highs: Bright, colourful, sharp pictures with SD and HD
Lows: Poor viewing angle; very slight backlight inconsistency; weak online offering

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 40in LCD
HD Ready: yes including 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: yes Freeview plus CI slot
Component video: yes one input
HDMI: yes four v1.3 HDMI
PC input: yes one VGA input
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 100,000:1
Dimensions: 870(w) x 686(h) x 85(d)mm
Weight: 20.5kg
Other features: 100Hz MotionFlow; Bravia Engine 3 processing; Ethernet port for DLNA PC and online functionality; Picture Frame mode; USB for multimedia file playback



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 37RV635
£550 Approx

Highs: Ridiculously affordable; sharp HD pictures; Res+ system for SD pictures
Lows: Limited viewing angle; light on features

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 37in LCD
HD Ready: yes including 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: yes Freeview plus CI slot
Component video: yes one input
HDMI: yes four v1.3 HDMI
PC input: yes one VGA input
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): 450cd/m2
Contrast ratio (claimed): 50,000:1
Dimensions: 1,009(w) x 649(h) x 94(d)mm
Weight: 19.7kg
Other features: Resolution+ processing; Active Vision II processing; USB port for JPEG playback; colour management

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Product of the Month

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Code HDEX344

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Code DD740

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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** 2012 Hollywood's latest disaster movie arrives on BD **ZOMBIELAND** Side-splitting horror comedy **FANTASTIC MR FOX** Stop-motion animation has never been so cool **GAMER** High concept actioner from the brains behind *Crank* **THE ARMY OF CRIME** Like 'Allo 'Allo! – but with guns **WATERWORLD** The Costner epic re-released in HD! **AND MUCH MORE!**

Dirty Harry

Harry Brown → Region B BD

Can Michael Caine's new thriller rival *Get Carter* in the Brit crime movie stakes? Turn to page 99 to find out...



HCC Ratings key

Michael Caine	1 2 3 4 5
WWE's Kane	1 2 3 4 5
Kane Hodder	1 2 3 4 5
Sugar cane	1 2 3 4 5
Being caned	1 2 3 4 5



'Oh noooo!
I left the
iron on!'



Not a total disaster

The film is weak, but *2012*'s Blu-ray presentation is epic



2012 is a film best summed up by leading man John Cusack: 'I've driven every vehicle you can think of away from every disaster you can think of. And run to and from every disaster you can think of.' That's essentially all Roland Emmerich's latest epic disaster flick is – 150 minutes of people running, driving or flying away from scenes of mass destruction. It almost becomes a parody of itself as you watch Cusack and co trying to get away from yet another earthquake/volcano/tsunami. The SFX are great, but the story is ponderous beyond belief.

Mark Craven: From its dazzling opening shots of solar flares on the Sun's surface, you know *2012*'s picture is going to be a treat, and the rest of the movie doesn't disappoint. The 2.35:1 AVC encode at times pops from the screen, with stunning contrast between the often bright colours and dark shadows. Detail levels are also high; sweat beads run off foreheads, blades of grass flicker in the wind and steam rises from, er, a deceased elk. The only issue I have with *2012*'s image is the occasional soft-looking CG effect, otherwise it's as good as you'd expect from a \$200m blockbuster.

Steve May: One thing you can say about any apocalypse is that they tend to be noisy. Buildings slide into the sea, tsunamis rage and volcanoes erupt, meaning that even as life as we know it comes to an end, your subwoofer will go out honking. In this sense, *2012* is a hoot, a very enjoyable example of high-end audio sound design. The soundtrack is layered and lavish, with fabulous effects steerage and unending sonic detail. The score is suitably portentous, and is delivered effortlessly by the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. And despite ambitious overcrowding, the dialogue remains clean, clear and silky smooth. The entire thing is of reference quality and well worth buying the Blu-ray for alone.

Anton van Beek: *2012* is packaged with some great extras. In addition to Sony's usual MovieIQ playback mode and BD-Live link, there's a commentary by director Roland Emmerich and co-writer Harald Kloser, a PiP video track (packed with interviews, behind-the-scenes footage and pre-viz animatics), three featurettes (covering the director, cast and pseudo-science behind the story), deleted scenes and more. And all in HD. Very nice.



HCC VERDICT

2012 → Sony Pictures → All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: An overblown disaster movie, but worth buying for the picture and sound quality

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Kamikaze Girls

Third Window Films → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Japanese pop culture and general wackiness abounds in this delightful buddy film about

the curious friendship between a small town daydreamer and a tough-as-nails biker girl. Third Window's Blu-ray offers an AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode that replicates the film's candy-coloured look and other visual tricks well, despite crushed blacks in a handful of scenes. On the downside, the only audio on offer is a front-heavy Japanese Dolby Digital 5.1 mix. The set also includes a bonus DVD packed with interviews, a *Making of...*, short film and more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Invention of Lying

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Ricky Gervais just doesn't seem able to find a suitable vehicle for his undoubted comic talents when it

comes to the bigscreen. Co-written and co-directed by the man himself, this high concept rom-com manages to drum up some big ideas regarding religion, but struggles to raise any laughs or semblance of a plot. The VC-1 1.85:1 encode is flat, too (possibly down to the film's low-key direction) and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is unadventurous. Extras include a short prequel, two featurettes, five deleted scenes, four podcasts and outtakes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Army of Crime

Optimum HE → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Set in occupied Paris, this fact-based WWII drama follows a group of resistance fighters denounced

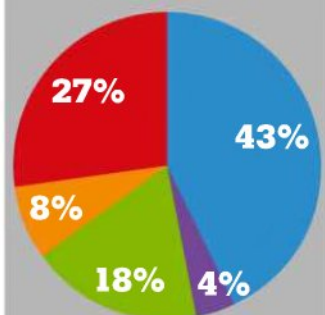
by the Nazis as 'The Army of Crime'. With fine performances, a thrilling story and a willingness to confront the subject of collaboration head-on, director Robert Guédiguian's flick is a must-see and well-served by this Blu-ray outing. The AVC 1.85:1 imagery is solid and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics, while subdued, are perfectly suited to the nature of the movie. Thoughtful extras include a meeting with a survivor from the actual events. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

We asked you...

Which is Roland Emmerich's best epic disaster flick?

- Independence Day
- Godzilla
- The Day After Tomorrow
- 2012
- None – the films themselves are disasters



Results of poll from
www.homecinemachoice.com

Old boy

Michael Caine is judge, jury and executioner

Harry Brown takes place in a tabloid hell – a land of urban decay where the shadowy streets are overrun by gun-toting, drug-dealing, Hoodie-wearing yooofs, while everybody else cowers inside their homes. The story itself is pure *Death Wish* stuff, with Michael Caine's titular pensioner being pushed too far by the murder of a friend, and going out with a gun to get some vigilante justice.

Whatever your views on 'Broken Britain', *Harry Brown* fails by adding nothing to discussion about the causes of urban crime, instead seeking vicarious thrills by watching an old man shooting ASBO kids (none of whom get developed into anything that resemble actual characters). Caine, unsurprisingly, puts in a good performance, but he deserves better than this – although as he admits in an interview on the disc, one of the main draws for him to the project was because there are so few leading parts for men of his age.

Mark Craven: Thanks to aesthetic decisions in post-production, *Harry Brown* doesn't deliver particularly compelling hi-def imagery. The choice to grade much of the film with a green-tinge leaves it with washed-out blacks that are lacking in detail. Elsewhere things look a little better – particularly the start of Marky's torture in Chapter 8, where his silhouette is crisply defined and the wrinkles on Harry's face are exquisitely detailed. So, while the AVC 2.35:1 encode itself is technically sound, it still makes for a rather hit-and-miss hi-def experience.

Steve May: I came to this Brit-thriller with few audio aspirations and by and large wasn't disappointed. This Lottery-funded revenge



The last fan of HD DVD was finally caught



HCC VERDICT

Harry Brown
Lionsgate
Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: A dark, bland thriller on an average disc. 'Arry wouldn't approve

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

fantasy has a tight, ruthless voice that does its job without recourse to theatrical distractions. Composers Martin Phipps and Ruth Barrett, who have a solid background in TV crime drama (*Wallander*, *The Take*, etc), ensure the beats are on target, but the clarity of the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack is largely unchallenged by what is, for the most part, a monophonic mix. Not a significant step up from the DVD's DD5.1 alternative, and consequently not a must-have reason to buy into the Blu-ray.

Anton van Beek: *Harry Brown* shuffles onto Blu-ray with a rather middling collection of extras. Your first port of call should be the commentary track, where Caine joins the film's director and producer for an amiable chat, rattling off plenty of amusing asides and anecdotes. There's also a reel of seven deleted/extended scenes (running 17mins), six somewhat repetitive EPK interviews with the main cast and director and a music video. All of the video extras are presented in hi-def.

Furry good fun

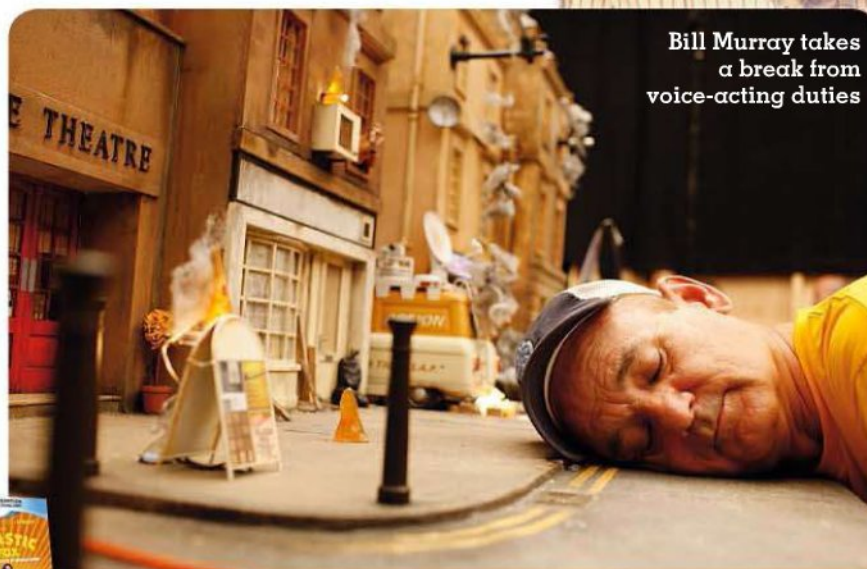
This 'toon puts a modern, stylish twist on a classic Roald Dahl tale



Fantastic Mr. Fox is, for our money, director Wes Anderson's best film since *Rushmore* in 1998. Based on Roald Dahl's book, this stop-motion animation is a magnificent example of Anderson's stylish, cerebral and dysfunctional brand of meticulously realised cinema. What younger kids make of it is anyone's guess, but at least there's plenty here for adults. The tale itself is understandably slight given the source material, but thanks to the excellent voice cast, arch script and fantastic model animation, it's a joy from start to finish.

Mark Craven: *Fantastic Mr. Fox* doesn't have the immediate visual impact of DreamWorks' or Pixar's CG animated features, but this still holds up well in hi-def. The film's autumnal palette means the AVC 1.78:1 encode is awash with inviting burnt oranges and reds – although the heavy colour grading does rob blacks of fine shadow detailing in places. Speaking of detail, this is one of those Blu-rays that'll have you freezing the frame, as you check out the intricate fur and fine textures of its animal cast.

Steve May: With its pristine dialogue clarity and upbeat music score, I've no hesitation in declaring this DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 sound mix fantastic. The quality voice cast (Clooney, Streep et al) is done great justice by the fidelity of the centre channel, while the often eclectic mix of feel-good pop and rock (The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, Jarvis Cocker) seamlessly blends with Alexandre Desplat's rhythmic compositions, nominated for Best Original Score in this year's Academy Awards. Much of the staging is across the front L/C/R with occasional licks to the rear,



Bill Murray takes a break from voice-acting duties



but you'll still feel engaged. The LFE doesn't get much of a work out, but that seems entirely appropriate in this sly gem.

Anton van Beek: Arriving as one of Fox's Triple-Play releases, the Blu-ray of *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is accompanied by both a DVD and Digital Copy of the movie. Traditional extras on the BD are six short featurettes, dominated by director Wes Anderson and Dahl's widow Felicity, which combine to make an adequate exploration of ...*Mr Fox's* production – I'd have preferred something a little more substantial.

The disc also includes a short (and pointless) guide to the sport Whack-Bat and a three-minute promo featurette that adds nothing to what's on offer elsewhere. All of the extras are in hi-def.

HCC VERDICT

Fantastic Mr. Fox
20th Century Fox
Region B BD → £29 Approx

We say: Apart from the limited extra features, this Blu-ray release is simply fantastic

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£23 Approx



Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs is pure cartoon family fun. Yes the plot is thin and the character

models look simplistic, but it works together to create a delightful 90 minutes of animated excitement. Sony's AVC 2.40:1 encode makes the most of the stylistic and brightly coloured animation, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is every bit as rambunctious as you'd expect. Extras include a chat track, production featurettes, extended scenes, a bonus DVD of the movie and more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Dante's Inferno: An Animated Epic

Anchor Bay → Region A/B BD
£20 Approx



'Abandon all hope ye who enter here' – a line from Dante's *Divine Comedy* that handily serves as a

warning to anyone buying this animated feature. Based on a hack-'n'-slash videogame, itself based (loosely) on the first part of the epic poem, it's terrifically juvenile stuff, despite the 18 rating. Each of the Nine Circles of Hell plays out with a big 'boss battle' against a foul demon – 'nuff said! As for the BD, its AVC 1.78:1 encode is bright and clean, the TrueHD 5.1 audio is no slouch, but the extras are limited to animatics and a game trailer. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Halo Legends

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Like *The Animatrix* and *Batman: Gotham Knights*, this is a collection of anime shorts set in a

pre-existing universe – in this case, that of the videogame *Halo*. They're enjoyable, too, thanks to superior storytelling and a wide range of approaches. The VC-1 1080p encode (a mix of 1.78:1 and 2.35:1) is technically sound, but audio is lossy DD5.1 only. Great extras include a commentary, two documentaries about the games and seven *Making of...* shorts. Ironical, though, that this BD about Microsoft's best-selling game can be watched on a PS3, but not its own Xbox 360. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Planet Hulk

Lionsgate → Region 2 DVD
£13 Approx



Unsurprisingly, this 88-minute feature ditches a lot of the depth of the year-long Marvel

comic book (where the green goliath gets to do his own intergalactic version of *Gladiator*). Still, it tells a decent story and is packed with cameos. The rather flat animation style doesn't help the anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer, but the DD5.1 mix is lively. Extras are a commentary, *Making of...* featurette and *Thor Tales of Asgard* preview. But will Lionsgate will be following *Planet Hulk* up with an adaptation of the comix sequel *World War Hulk*? The fans need to know! **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5



Dead and lovin' it

There's just something funny about zombies, isn't there?

Angry mob: The Bar-B-Q staff didn't take well to criticism of their spare ribs

Zombieland picks up where most of its fellow genre outings end, skipping the outbreak of the undead altogether to focus on how survivors cope with living in a world populated by flesh-eating ghouls.

Originally developed as a TV series, *Zombieland* makes a seamless jump to cinema. It's 88 minutes of action, gore and laughs, helped by an excellent cast (including Woody Harrelson and Jesse Eisenberg). Up there with *Shaun of the Dead* as one of the funniest, inventive zombie films around.

Mark Craven: A low-fi gore-strewn zombie comedy wouldn't be anyone's choice for BD demo material, but *Zombieland* still delivers a satisfying HD experience. The colour palette is often muted – even the frequent gushes of blood are dark and sickly – but the image is excellently detailed, with clean edges and a natural feel. A handful of interior shots do seem soft and flat, but this a problem

with the source material and not Sony's AVC 2.40:1 transfer itself.

Steve May: While not a dead loss, *Zombieland*'s DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack is surprisingly uneventful. Not technically inept, just steadfastly routine. There are some nice directional effects, particularly during the action and chase sequences in the final, fairground reel, but that doesn't make its sonic effort anything other than ordinary; it hasn't shaken off its TV series origins in this respect. However, while much of the audio is anchored to the L/C/R, there's a rockingly effective music track (look out for the OST sometime soon!) which does get splashed about.

Anton van Beek: Being a Sony Pictures release, *Zombieland* comes with the usual collection of MovieIQ functionality, BD-Live link and cross-promotional trailers, but there's also a meaty batch of extras dedicated to the film itself. The major Blu-ray exclusive is the *Beyond the Graveyard: Picture-in-Picture* track, which highlights the making of specific scenes through interviews, raw footage and visual FX deconstructions. On top of this there's also a light-hearted audio commentary, two *Making of...* featurettes, seven deleted scenes, four *Visual Effects Progression* sequences and five promo trailers – all in hi-def.



HCC VERDICT

Zombieland
Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx

We say: This cult hit in the making gets a solid hi-def debut

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Cruising for a bruising

This inventive maritime thriller makes a splash on its Blu-ray debut



Triangle is a true mindbender of a movie, but one that represents a huge step-up in both storytelling and directorial terms for Brit writer/director Christopher 'Creep' Smith.

Melissa George plays Jess, a single mother with an autistic son, who takes a day off work to go sailing on a friend's boat. When the boat is capsized by a freak storm, the survivors have to take a refuge on a seemingly abandoned cruise ship, only for them to be picked off one-by-one until only Jess and the killer are left. During a fight Jess manages to throw the killer overboard, but it's only then that things start getting really weird...

Mark Craven: This Blu-ray version of *Triangle* provides an image that is true to the filmmaker's intentions, if not always a showcase for the hi-def tech itself. Although it was shot using Panasonic Genesis HD cameras, the film has been subject to plenty of post-processing, particularly with regards to pumping up the contrast in exteriors, bleaching skies and areas of white, and sometimes resulting in a drop in detail. With all of that in mind, the AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode delivers a solid sunburnt image that appears to match the filmmaker's intentions perfectly, so it's hard to complain.

Steve May: Salty shocker *Triangle* should be a good example of how imaginative audio design can be used to enhance a low-budget production, adding creepy cues and sonic jolts in appropriate measure. But while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is effective in keeping the unfolding mystery afloat, there are sonic caveats which mitigate against this effort: the Foley effects and dialogue are just a little too strident for comfort (perhaps reflecting production restraints?). Consequently, this is not a movie you'll want to crank up to eleven. On the



plus side, Christian Henson's unsettling score is economically effective..

Anton van Beek: Those of you confused by *Triangle*'s twists and turns should check out director Chris Smith's audio commentary, where he not only offers an interesting discussion of the filmmaking process, but also provides his own interpretation(s) of the movie he made. Joining this on the Blu-ray disc are a 42-min *Making of...*; two deleted scenes (a third is hidden as an Easter Egg); three storyboard galleries; a CG FX featurette; and the winning entry from a Design Your Own Triangle Poster competition.

HCC VERDICT

Triangle → Icon Home Entertainment
Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: This twisty-turny thriller delivers plenty of chills, if not hi-def thrills, on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Saw VI: Extreme Edition

Lionsgate → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Saw VI brings absolutely nothing new to the tired horror series and proves almost

incomprehensible to anyone who doesn't have an innate knowledge of all five preceding instalments. Its AVC 1.78:1 imagery is the usual mix of garish colours and gritty industrial imagery, while the DTS-HD MA 7.1 audio assaults your ears with a cacophony of screams and grinding gears. Extras include two commentaries, four music videos, three behind-the-scenes featurettes and various Lionsgate gadgets including iPhone apps. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Doctor Who: The Masque of Mandragora

Zentertain Ltd → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



In this four-part story from 1976, Tom Baker's Doctor and companion Sarah Jane Smith deal with

palace intrigue, a sinister cult and a living energy force in 15th Century Italy. The story doesn't always grip, but the use of Portmerion as a stand-in for Renaissance Italy works well and is an agreeable change from the usual Dorset quarry locations. As usual, the 1.33:1 transfer and mono audio have been lovingly restored, and Zentertain has rustled up a fan-pleasing collection of extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Mystic River

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Clint Eastwood's fantastic 2003 crime drama makes an impressive bow on Blu-ray. The VC-1

2.35:1 encode doesn't strike as the most exciting hi-def imagery around, but a comparison with prior DVD releases proves just how much of an upgrade it offers in terms of enhanced clarity, detailing and more accurate colours. Likewise, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is delightfully nuanced, and brings depth to Eastwood's own score. There are no new extras, but all of the good stuff from the SD platter is here, including a commentary, two featurettes, extensive interviews and trailers. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

City Girl

Eureka → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Writing reviews of new HD discs from Eureka's Masters of Cinema Series is like doing the same for

a Pixar Blu-ray – there's nothing to complain about in either case. With this BD outing for FW Murnau's 1930 drama/romance, the company has pulled off the kind of spectacular feat it managed with the Blu-ray of *Sunrise*. Apart from some minor print damage, the restored AVC encode looks exquisite, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 incarnation of the new 2008 score is beautifully resonant. Extras consist of a 40-page booklet and detailed commentary. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Waterworld

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Hailed as the film that sank Kevin Costner's blockbuster status, *Waterworld* is actually not that

bad. As far as *Mad Max* rip-offs set in world where the polar ice caps have melted go, it's about as good as you'll get – the action (when it comes) is spectacular and Costner does a decent job as the mopey antihero. This Blu-ray features a solid, if slightly inconsistent, AVC 1.85:1 encode partnered with a DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix that excels with the film's score. Sadly, beyond D-Box and My Scenes functionality, and the theatrical trailer (in SD), there are no extras to be found. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

In the Electric Mist

High Fliers → Region B BD
£20 Approx



In the Electric Mist is another instance of an acclaimed novel being transformed into a so-so

cinematic experience. It's not the fault of the cast (headlined by Tommy Lee Jones) or the modern noir tale itself, but possibly the decision to trim a whopping 15 minutes of material from the film before its release, leaving the final act rather muddled. As for the disc, the MPEG-2 2.35:1 1080p encode is bright, but sometimes lacking in fine detail, while audio is only provided in 'lossy' DD5.1 and DD2.0 options. Sadly there are no extras. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Halloween II

Entertainment in Video → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



Rob Zombie puts the final nail in Michael Myers' coffin with this hateful sequel to his unnecessary 2007

remake of the slasher classic. Populated by Zombie's usual mix of hillbillies and strippers, the film (presented in just its theatrical cut on this UK release) revels in despair to the degree that even the survivors of the first film are transformed into bitter, unlikeable characters this time out. It also makes for a dispiriting DVD experience thanks to an oppressively dark anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer. The DD5.1 audio is better, but the extras are crap-tastic. Please, don't bother with *Halloween III*. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Terry Gilliam's mind-bending adaptation of Hunter S. Thompson's semi-autobiographic,

drug-fuelled novel should make for a tremendous hi-def experience, but this Blu-ray doesn't quite deliver the expected goods. The VC-1 2.35:1 imagery is a clear improvement on previous DVDs, but suffers from a less than perfect print. Also, none of the excellent extras from the Criterion Collection DVD are included; you only get 12 minutes of deleted scenes, an EPK featurette, My Scenes, D-Box and a BD-Live link. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

First-person shooter

If you love computer games, you'll love this...

Gamer is the latest outing from HCC favourites and *Crank* masterminds Neveldine/Taylor (yes, they insist on being called that), a near-future mash-up of *The Running Man* and *Death Race* that takes place in a world where death row inmates act as real-life avatars for gamers in a gore-strewn shoot 'em up. In short, it's another of the filmmaking duo's hyperactive action extravaganzas, packed with violence, social satire, lewdness and an almost avant-garde approach to editing. A real guilty pleasure.

Mark Craven: I've got no complaints about *Gamer*'s Blu-ray debut. Shot using RedOne digital cinema cameras, the VC-1 1.85:1 encode is packed full of rough textures and exceptional detailing. The style of the film flicks between over-saturated colours (as seen in the world of *Society in Chapter 2*) and the murkier world of the *Slayers* game (see Chapter 6 for plenty of this), and the encode handles both with incredible accuracy. It's not always the prettiest film you'll ever watch, but in terms of a Blu-ray transfer that accurately represents the filmmakers' original intentions, *Gamer* hits all of the right notes.

Steve May: If *Gamer* is to win any awards it should be for World's Loudest Movie. This psychotronic bloodfest is off the scale when it comes to sheer sonic attack. The LFE is concussive and prolonged, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundfield is racked with explosions and weapons fire. The score by Robert Williamson and Geoff Zanelli is largely industrial



The trouser thief strikes again!



HCC VERDICT

Gamer → EIV
Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: Prepare to be pwn'd by this videogame-inspired Blu-ray stunner

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

grunge metal, and so fitting in the extreme. If you want to prove to your mates that not only do you have surround speakers, but they can roar like banshees, then this is the Blu-ray for you. Most will hate this. I just want listen to it all over again.

Anton van Beek: Despite being spread across two discs, *Gamer* doesn't feature that many extras. But the good news is that those present are all worth checking out. On Disc One is a traditional audio commentary, plus a Maximum Movie Mode-esque Icon Mode. Presented by the writer/director duo, this stops/rewinds the film at key points to highlight hidden gags, cuts away to behind-the-scenes footage and provides additional commentary – in doing so adding over half-an-hour to the running time. Over on the second disc is a 41-minute reel of behind-the-scenes vignettes and the excellent *Inside the Game: Controlling Gamer* – an exhaustive 80-minute look at the making of the film.

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About the Masters of Cinema Series Blu-rays

- *Sunrise* – The winner of our 2009 Best Remastering award, this tale of an idyllic marriage threatened by a Machiavellian seductress is pin-sharp, detailed and packed with contrast. We said: 'This could be the most important release yet in the Blu format's history.'
- *Mad Detective* – An inventive and unpredictable crime thriller that turns clichés on their heads while celebrating the insanity of its hero. It not only looks fantastic, it also presents the film exactly as the director intended.
- *Soul Power* – Drawing on the footage shot alongside the award-winning *When We Were Kings*, director Jeffrey Levy-Hinte follows the spectacular 3-day music festival that preceded the Ali-Foreman rumble in the jungle. The music benefits from exquisite Dolby True HD and DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio mixes.

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

A cynic writes...

First of all, Blu-ray. Call me cynical if you wish, but I have a nagging feeling about its future. The roll-out of films and back-catalogue titles seems to me to be achingly slow, and I really can't understand why. Large numbers of films are still being released purely on DVD without Blu-ray counterparts. For example, I wanted to buy *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* but it was only available on DVD – even in the US. Why no Blu-ray? Why aren't the studios pushing it as hard as they can? I'm wondering if the powers that be have found an alternative (and near-future replacement) technology. What do you guys think? Am I being paranoid?

And secondly, I would like to add to the *Avatar* debate. I went to see it at the IMAX at Bradford and was stunned. It was the most amazing movie-going experience I have ever had. I felt a little dizzy for the first few minutes but was soon 'in the movie' standing next to Sigourney Weaver! Okay, some of the dialogue was typical James Cameron but, nitpicking aside, he should be applauded for what is a staggering achievement. If this is the future then bring it on! I'd even stick the wife on eBay if it meant being able to afford this experience in my home!

Terry Wells, via email

With regards to your first point, it's true that studios have concentrated (somewhat understandably) on FX-driven Hollywood blockbusters to grab initial sales of Blu-ray. However, as the market has matured and grown we've started to see distributors branching out with foreign-

language titles, classic movies (although the latter often require significant restoration first) and other types of cinema. Sadly, we've still not got any news for you with regards to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* going Blu, and there's every chance this title could now be caught up with Disney's ongoing efforts to sell off Miramax (the movie's producers) and its catalogue.

As for your second point: we agree (although not necessarily about selling your wife on eBay). If there's one title due later this year that is going to get the entire HCC team to splash out on lavish new 3DTVs and Blu-ray decks, then it's James



Basterds: Had any playback problems?

Cameron's award-winning sci-fi epic.

QT no play

A recent issue of your magazine featured a write up of

Inglourious Basterds on Blu-ray but didn't mention anything about problems with the disc.

I have a Denon DVD-3800BD player which refused to play two versions of the BD. I also



My high-end system needs help

Hi, I'm a regular reader of your magazine and I love it. Just one complaint: whenever I write in for advice my email doesn't get answered. So please can you help me! I am building a home cinema and my kit consists of a Denon AVP/POA AIHD pre-power combo and a Denon DVD AIUD. I'm using my existing speakers, a 7.1 Jamo D7-PEX array.

I had these with my previous setup, the DENON A1XVA amp and DVD A1XVA and it used to sound pretty amazing – the dialogue was crisp and clear. But now with the new system, the dialogue seems to get drowned out so I'm struggling to hear. Am I doing something wrong? My front three speakers are bi-amped and I'm using Chord XLR plugs from the

AVP to the POA, Denon Link 4TH for the HD sound. Please help.

Last of all, if I was to change my speakers, what would really complement my POA and AVP? My price range is between £5,000 and £8,000. Or are my Jamos fine? Thanks.
Moninder Sahota,
via email

If you are hearing recessed dialogue with a full Denon A1 system with DL4 connectivity something is definitely wrong with the system or the set-up, as this is one of the most revealing and detailed home cinema systems on the planet. Try running set-up again (covering

at least six positions) and check the EQ graphs for 'Audyssey Flat'. As the Jamo D7-PEX array uses identical front three speakers there should be only



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tried it on a Panasonic DMP-BD55 – again, no joy.

Any other readers had problems with this title? *Jamie, via email*

The reason we made no mention of playback problems is because it played fine! None of the *HCC* staff have had problems with this title at all, so we'd recommend making sure your BD players have been updated with the latest firmware.

Sky moan

I upgraded to Sky HD just before Christmas when they were giving away the HD boxes for free if you signed up for movies.

Of course, we now know it's because they were trying to shift as many of the old stockpiled HD boxes as they could, before launching the new ITB unit.

This is typical Sky behaviour in my experience! *Anonymous, via hcc online*

This situation will always happen – it's the same for people who bought a PS3 just before the PS3 Slim was released. However, you did get the box for 'free', so you shouldn't be too upset. And do you really need ITB of hard drive space? Don't most of us have plenty of long-ignored recordings lounging on our

minor room-related differences in the frequency plot and EQ. If there are any major anomalies it's likely that one of the midrange drivers of the centre speaker has finally wobbled off its mortal coil. In a D'Appolito array that is going to make for a very noticeable balance change.

It might also be a connection issue or one of the channels in the power amp at fault – so check all your connections, and if possible, swap speakers around to see if the issue follows the speaker or the amp terminals.

Assuming the centre speaker is the issue, a simple replacement part or new centre speaker would be the best solution if you are otherwise happy with the excellent D7-PEX system. If you desire an upgrade you will need to be looking at the top-end of your budget to

make a big difference. Also, once you have had a set-up with three identical speakers up-front – there is no going back to a dedicated 'centre' speaker as they just don't gel as well! There are not many brands that offer speakers of a similar shape to the D7-PEX, but I would see if you can track down and listen to B&W's CT700 series array (or CT800 if the budget will stretch) or Tannoy's Definition Install models. Either way, I would opt for a sub from a specialist sub-company and Velodyne's DD15 – or even better a pair of DD15's – would be a superb match for either set-up.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Moninder wins a copy of *Smokin' Aces: The Collection* on Blu-ray, courtesy of Universal Pictures. It's available to buy now, priced £30 approx.

HDDs that could easily be deleted to make space?

BD plus DivX, please

Hi there, I wonder if you could help recommend a Blu-ray player that supports DivX as well as all the audio bells and whistles. My ideal budget is around £200.

Lee, via email

Plenty of BD players on the market also support DivX, so you shouldn't have a problem finding one for £200 or less, including Samsung's BD-P1600, LG's BD370, Panasonic's DMP-BD60 and Toshiba's BDX2000. But if your 'audio bells and whistles' includes 7.1 analogue audio outputs, your choices are smaller. Look for reduced prices on LG's BD390, Panasonic's DMP-BD80 and Philips' recently-released BDP7500.

I need a hero!

I've been a happy subscriber for a couple of years now, and look forward to when the magazine arrives every month. I do have a request though: I find much joy reading *Home Cinema Heroes* to learn a bit about 'who is who' in the world of cinema. Actually, I keep a list of movies to get, which I have collected from those pages.

My question is this: is it possible to obtain all of the *Home Cinema Heroes* articles? Could they be made available to subscribers online? I'm sure many readers would find this a source of inspiration when planning their next movie purchases.

Ole Seberg, via email

We've already collected the first batch of our *Home Cinema Heroes* features into an online e-zine. Point your browser at <http://hcc.techradar.com/e-zines> to download it. A second volume will follow soon ●

Write to Letters, *Home Cinema Choice*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW, or email us at hcc@futurenet.co.uk. Due to the volume of letters we receive we cannot guarantee to print/answer them all.

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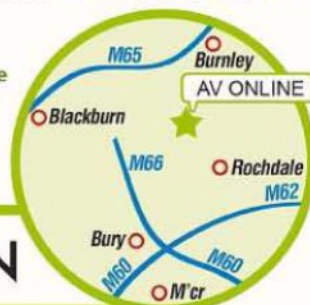
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Disappointing	1	2	3	4	5
Don't touch it	1	2	3	4	5

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5800
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

First ever Bravia with a built-in Freesat HD tuner

Highs: Picture performance; 200Hz tech put to good use
Lows: CCFL-backlight; limited net interactivity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat HD and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV

Highs: Loaded with features; brings a genuine sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 films
Lows: Backlight a bit weak

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SAMSUNG
46in → UE-46B8000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-flight edge-lit LED panel will sell like hot cakes

Highs: Outstanding picture quality; 200Hz works well
Lows: Some of the settings are awful; limited viewing angle

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
42in → 42SL9000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LG's LED-lit 'Seamless' LCD offers excellent value for money

Highs: Exceptional pictures; ISF-certified calibrated controls
Lows: Black levels aren't A-list; 'Seamless' design isn't all that

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SHARP
52in → LC52LE700E
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Bigscreen LED LCD with calibration skills

Highs: Low power use; bright, involving pictures
Lows: Muted reds; poor off-axis viewing; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& CI slot)

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.sharp.co.uk

Also Recommended...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5500
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 Z-Series builds upon previous Bravia know-how

Highs: Wonderfully detailed pictures; bright, crisp colours
Lows: Black levels are a tad light; poor off-axis viewing

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



SAMSUNG
32in → LE32B650
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Net-savvy 32incher is a real bargain buy

Highs: Huge feature count; excellent HD pics; sexy design
Lows: SD performance and audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



TOSHIBA
46in → 46SV685DB
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut LED-backlit screen from Tosh is a real eye-opener

Highs: Excellent contrast and detail; good quality audio; multimedia talents
Lows: Not particularly stylish

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.toshiba.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
46in → 46PFL9704
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The second generation of Philips' LED-backlit LCD TV improves on its predecessor by adding 75 per cent more light emitting diodes, enabling far greater control over local dimming. And it shows – the 46PFL9704's black level response is startling, shadow detailing is first-rate, and colours are rich, vibrant yet subtle. HD pictures routinely left us flabbergasted. Elsewhere, this 46incher ticks all the boxes, with Philips' brilliant Net TV functionality, five HDMI inputs, solid SD upscaling and a gorgeous brushed aluminium finish.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.philips.co.uk

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx



Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy

Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot and DVB-S2 tuner)

Tested: Issue 164
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx



Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD

Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx



THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set

Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PIONEER
50in → PDP-LX5090
£2,500 Approx



Baby brother of the LX6090 Kuro panel

Highs: Unbelievable contrast and black levels; superb detail

Lows: Speakers are an optional extra only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx



World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity

Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus analogue)

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx



Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel

Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 154
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
37in → TH-37PX80
£650 Approx



Small PDP from Panasonic continues the Viera vibe

Highs: Beautiful blacks; natural colours; good GUI

Lows: HDMI v1.2 inputs lack DeepColor support

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3 (v1.2)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx



Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail

Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx



THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat)



Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



DENON
Blu-ray → DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference universal Blu-ray player that sets new standards

Highs: Stunning life-like picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling

Lows: Complex to set up; not for those on a budget!

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P3600
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-level Samsung BD spinner

Highs: Impressive pics and sound; 7.1-channel output; DivX HD playback

Lows: No WMA support; PC streaming tricky to set up; Wi-Fi requires dongle

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, Wi-Fi via supplied dongle, USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs

Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet/Wi-Fi (including YouTube), USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD80
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Flagship 2009 deck adds YouTube fun to top-class specs

Highs: Full multichannel outputs; superb, detailed images; net functionality

Lows: Uninspired design; sluggish loading times

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, VieraCast, SD card slot, USB 2.0

Tested: Issue 169
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



DENON
Blu-ray → DBP-1610
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Affordable Denon deck benefits from brand's attention to detail

Highs: Good, natural-looking picture; quality audio performance; great value

Lows: No analogue outs; slow to load our test disc

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, SD card slot for BD-Live

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S760 → £380 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Sony has a few Blu-ray decks now that are comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console, and the keenly-priced S760 is our favourite. It incorporates the HD Reality Enhancer and Super Bit-Mapping picture-processing tech of its £1,200 BDP-S5000ES stablemate (albeit in a thinner chassis) and the results are startling – detailed, deep, colour-rich HD visuals and quality surround sound delivery. Some might miss the lack of esoteric codec support (no MKV here, folks) but that's not what this Sony is about – consider it a reference machine for the budget-conscious.

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound

Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image

Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S360
£190 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Affordable Sony Blu-ray is a real rival to its PS3

Highs: Stylish design and good AV performance; very solid construction

Lows: External memory required for BD-Live access

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx



Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess

Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx



First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No
CI slot: Yes
Freeview+: No

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx



500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Capacious HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent

Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: No
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sagem.com/uk



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx



Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures

Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



TOPFIELD
PVR → TF5810PVR
£350 Approx



Freeview+ PVR with enormous 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; PC connectivity; upscales Freeview; twin tuners offer great flexibility

Lows: Competing with high-end DVD recorders

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: Yes
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 156
For more info visit:
www.topfield.co.uk

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx



Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability

Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX79
£300 Approx



2009 DVD/HDD recorder improves slightly on the EX78

Highs: AV performance is first-rate; heaps of features and recording flexibility

Lows: No STB control; can't copy DivX/JPEG to HDD

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 169
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx



Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850 → £1,000 Approx



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility.

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

AV Receivers

Best on test...



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX82
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

ICE-powered AIR Studios-tuned AVR replaces the SC-LX81

Highs: Punchy, highly detailed sound; brilliant features; looks fabulous; solid build

Lows: Pioneer doesn't do height/width processing

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 190W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



YAMAHA
AVR → RX-V2065
£850 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

New-look Yamaha receiver is a great sub-£1K all-rounder

Highs: Superb networking prowess; wonderful natural sound that suits all material

Lows: GUI takes some getting used to

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.yamaha.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR807
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Powerful and potent height/width processor at a great price

Highs: Full-on gung-ho sound with massive bass; DSX/DPLIIz processing; excellent upscaling

Lows: Slightly flimsy build; no USB or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 180W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4810
£2,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Denon's top-of-the-line AVR makes all kinds of speaker configurations possible

Highs: Audyssey DSX 11-channel capable; rich, powerful sound; feature-packed

Lows: No THX certification

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (FM/AM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



SONY
AVR → STR-DH800
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Slick, flexible bargain model with provision for wireless multiroom audio

Highs: Superb value; big and smooth sound; easy to use

Lows: No video upscaling or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 85W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: No
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No, unless you use S-Air wireless speakers
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

ARCAM
AVR → AVR600
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

British manufacturer Arcam arrived late to the HD audio party, but the AVR600 is certainly worth the wait. Utilising a Class G analogue amplifier, this silver machine is cool-running and efficient, while an entire 'root and branch' overhaul of multichannel AV amp design has allowed Arcam to tackle audio jitter head on. Yet this isn't purely an audiophile product – it's packed with custom install features, offers an insane array of connections, and delivers Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA Blu-ray mixes with aplomb. A class act from a classic brand.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.arcam.co.uk

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: DAB/AM/FM
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and Zone 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 5
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)



Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.nadelectronics.com



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR3007
£1,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

9.2-channel HD receiver oozes power and performance

Highs: Solid, three-dimensional audio; excellent upscaler

Lows: You might not use all the features; looks like every other Onk on the market

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 200W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 7-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Projectors

Best on test...



SIM2
DLP → Grand Cinema
C3X 1080
£23,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference-status PJ with brilliant colour management

Highs: Gorgeous design; small form factor; dazzling pictures

Lows: SD processing isn't quite hi-end enough for the price

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): NA
Contrast (claimed): 10,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 169
For more info visit:
www.sim2.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H1085
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A brilliant Full HD projector at a mouth-watering price

Highs: Rich colours; excellent image tweaks; 12V trigger

Lows: Noisy runner in high brightness mode; some low-level noise in darker scenes

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com



SONY
SXR → VPL-VW85
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Successor the VW80 delivers a truly cinematic picture

Highs: Astonishing contrast and detail levels; plenty of picture tweaks

Lows: MotionFlow tech is best left unused

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk/biz



OPTOMA
DLP → Themescene HD82
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A tasty development of a distinguished product line

Highs: Good blacks levels; impressive colour performance; easy to set up

Lows: Some dynamic iris noise; some DLP rainbow effect

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 20,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Updated flagship PJ adds red-rich lamp and 12V trigger

Highs: Smooth filmic pictures; easy to setup and use; handy feature set

Lows: Boxy design; be careful with high frame-rate settings

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 100,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Also Recommended...



BENQ
DLP → W1000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A £1K Full HD projector with good colour presets

Highs: Very sharp HD pictures; alluring tactile finish; plenty of fine-tuning options

Lows: Rainbow effect; noticeable fan noise

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 3,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 27dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
benq.co.uk



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness

Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan

Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com

Editor's Choice...

JVC
D-ILA → HD950
£6,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Put simply, JVC's new video-chucker is capable of an awe-inspiring performance. Spin up a Blu-ray and you'll be rewarded with three-dimensional, natural-looking pictures that are packed with detail, shadow subtlety and vibrant colours. Setting up the HD950 is made easy by its fully-motorised optical adjustments, and a THX-certified colour preset for those not wanting to get their hands dirty in its extensive calibration menus. It's an almost silent runner, too. The best PJ we've yet seen at this price point.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.jvc.co.uk

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 900 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 400, 3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.bostonacoustics.com



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



BOWERS & WILKINS
5.1 → CM Series
£4,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top quality 5.1 array in a classical wood finish

Highs: True sweet highs from hi-tech tweeters; brilliant 10in woofer; solid construction
Lows: Square-edge design not exactly high-end

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 3 x 200W, 2 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



MISSION
5.1 → 79 Series
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Floor-standing system with innovative side-firing bass drivers

Highs: Sophisticated and clean-sounding; excellent stereo imagery; easy on the eye
Lows: Not the most powerful or deepest bass in its class; won't go super-loud

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 200W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears only

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit:
www.mission.co.uk

Also Recommended...



JAMO
5.1 → A 102 HCS 5
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Good-value 5.1 system with living-room-friendly size/looks

Highs: Relaxed, intelligible dialogue presentation; available online for as little as £200
Lows: Subwoofer lacks real subterranean power; small satellites lend a rawness to the audio

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 60W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Cherry; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit:
www.jamo.com



WHARFEDALE
5.1 → Diamond 10 HCP
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sub/sat system mixes hi-fi roots with a 10in woofer

Highs: Powerful subwoofer; exciting treble; highly musical
Lows: A little bright at high volume; might not be visceral enough for action movie fans

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 75W,
1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 150W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.wharfedale.co.uk



FOCAL JMLAB
5.1 → Dome
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Bold, full and detailed sound quality for music and home cinema; gorgeous design
Lows: Large cabinets offer more presence; bit pricey

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 100W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Aluminium; red, black, white; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.focal-uk.com

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio

experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.kef.com/gb

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

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Subwoofers

Best on test...



NAIM
SW → n-Sub
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class AB amp-driven premium-level subwoofer

Highs: Rich, textured bass with tight control; innovative features
Lows: High-end rivals have a bit more grunt to 'em

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 2-Hz-250Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 350W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29.6kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.naim-audio.com



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent I
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance
Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.martinlogan.com



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control
Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



TANNOY
SW → TS1201
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

12in sub with simultaneous LFE and speaker level inputs

Highs: Smart looks; easy of use; real weight and presence
Lows: Remote control will cost you extra

→ Specifications

Frequency response: Down to 21Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 16.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.tannoy.com



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration
Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172
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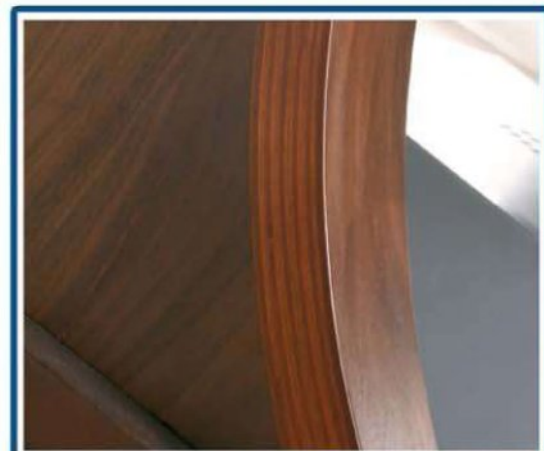
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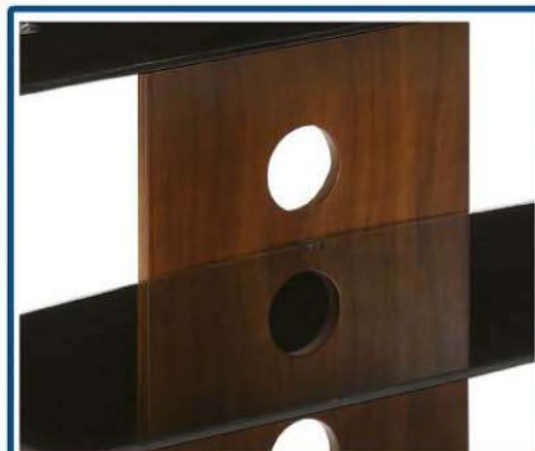
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